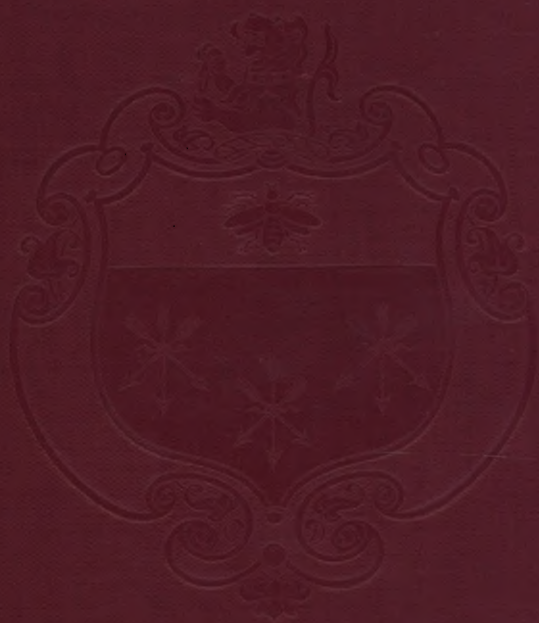
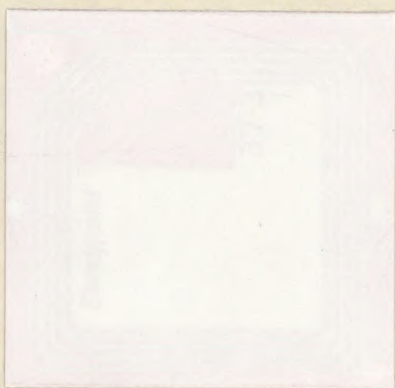


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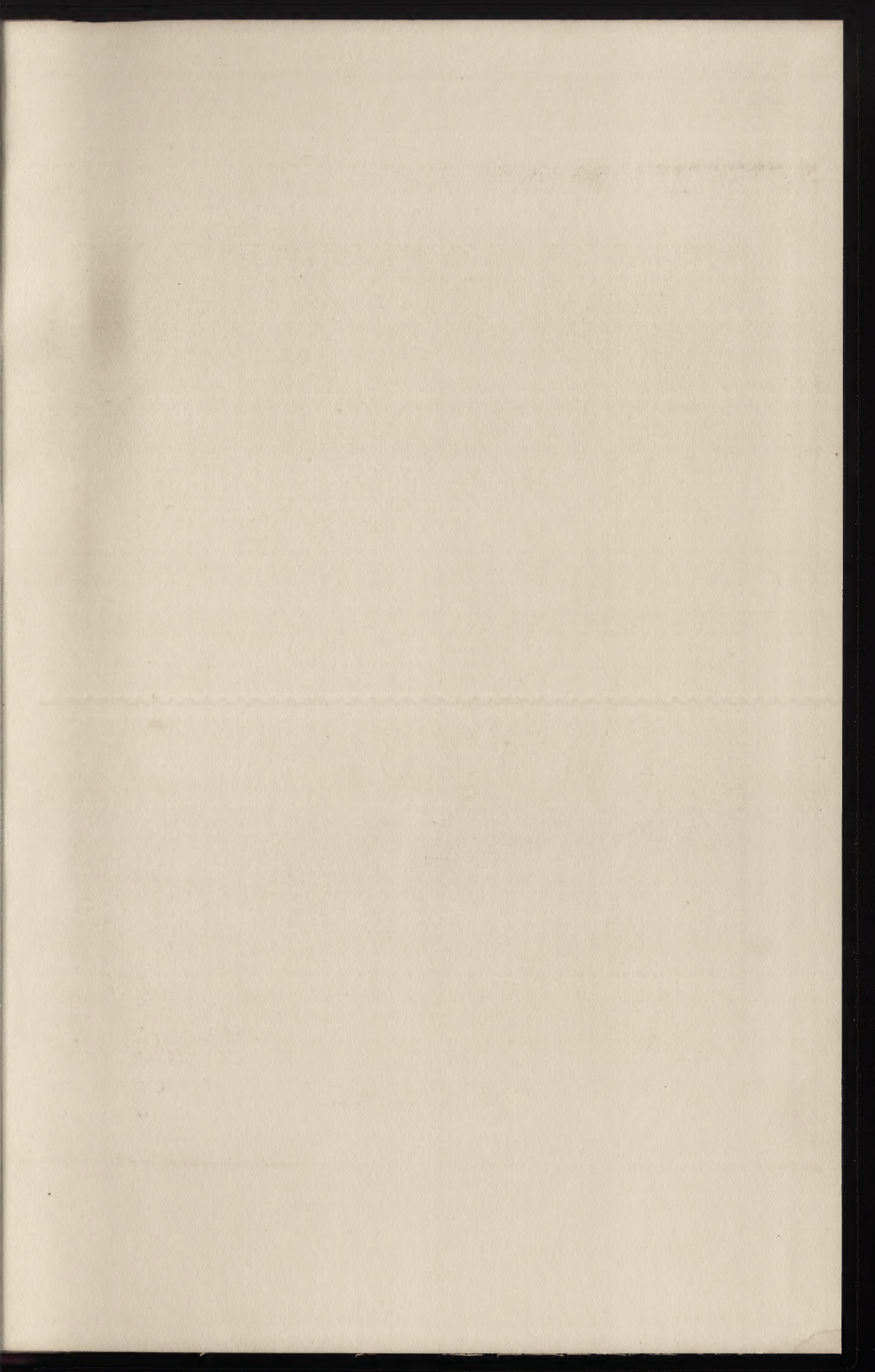
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by
Sir Walter Armstrong

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THE PEEL COLLECTION
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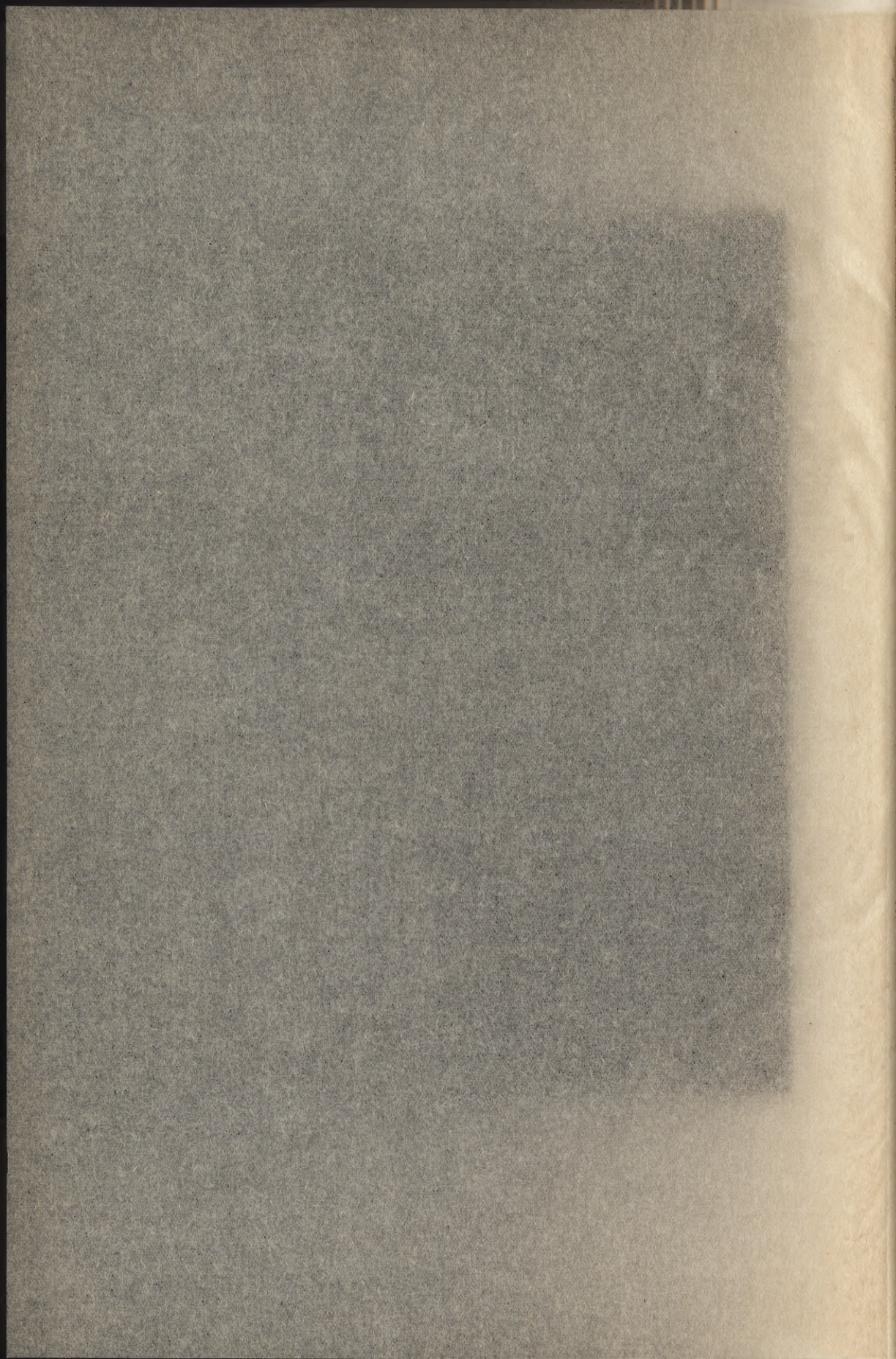


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THE PEEL COLLECTION
AND THE
DUTCH SCHOOL OF PAINTING

By
SIR WALTER ARMSTRONG

Director of the National Gallery of Ireland



LONDON
SEELEY AND CO. LIMITED, GREAT RUSSELL STREET
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THE PEEL COLLECTION

AND THE

DUTCH SCHOOL OF PAINTING

CHAPTER I

The Art of Holland

THE collection of seventy-eight pictures brought together by the second Sir Robert Peel, and purchased for the National Gallery from the third baronet in 1871, consists of fifty-five examples of the Dutch School, twelve of the Flemish and ten of the British. It also includes an Italian picture of no importance, and eighteen drawings by Rubens and Van Dyck. The Flemish dozen includes the famous "Chapeau de Paille," now corrected into "Chapeau de Poil," of Rubens, and another example of the same master in the fine "Triumph of Silenus." In consequence of always being skied, this "Triumph" has never attracted the admiration it deserves. His own portrait represents Van Dyck, and a "Family Group" Gonzales Coques. The seven specimens of David Teniers the younger are good though not superlative examples; they are far inferior, for instance, to the "Players at Tric-Trac" bequeathed by Lord Farnborough. The English, or rather British, pictures include eight Sir Joshuas, one Lawrence and one Wilkie. With the exception of the Rubens pictures and drawings, which deserve a monograph to themselves, none of these touch the high level reached by the Dutch collection. Over this Sir Robert displayed a solicitude which had scarcely been equalled since the making of that famous Choiseul gallery in which so many of his own treasures had once had a home. He sought the best advice, never hesitated to

draught an inferior specimen when a better one was to be had, and so gradually brought together in his house in Whitehall Gardens the finest cabinet of Dutch pictures ever collected by an amateur. Some account of his methods of purchasing will be given in a later chapter.

In the following pages the title "The Dutch School" will be used somewhat freely, for I shall include several Flemings who were directly affected by Holland, who would not have worked as they did had no painting existed north of the Scheldt. This will allow of a more catholic view than would otherwise be possible.

A few days after sitting down to write *Modern Painters*, John Ruskin, then not long out of his teens, composed the following sentences:—"Most pictures of the Dutch school, excepting always those of Rubens, Vandyke and Rembrandt, are ostentatious exhibitions of the artist's power of speech, the clear and vigorous elocution of useless and senseless words; while the early efforts of Cimabue and Giotto are the burning messages of prophecy, delivered by the stammering lips of infants. It is not by ranking the former as more than mechanics, or the latter as less than artists, that the taste of the multitude, always awake to the lowest pleasures art can bestow, and blunt to the highest, is to be formed or elevated. It must be the part of the judicious critic carefully to distinguish what is language, and what is thought, and to rank and praise pictures chiefly for the latter, considering the former as a totally inferior excellence, and one which cannot be compared with, nor weighed against, thought in any way, or in any degree whatsoever. The picture which has the nobler and more numerous ideas, however awkwardly expressed, is a greater and better picture than that which has the less noble and less numerous ideas, however beautifully expressed. No weight, nor mass, nor beauty of execution, can outweigh one grain or fragment of thought. Three pen strokes of Raffaele are a greater and a better picture than the most finished work that ever Carlo Dolci polished into inanity. A finished work of a great artist is only better than its sketch, if the sources of pleasure belonging to colour and realization—valuable in themselves—are so employed as to increase the impressiveness of the thought. But if one atom of thought has vanished, all colours, all finish, all execution, all ornament, are too

dearly bought. Nothing but thought can pay for thought, and the instant that the increasing refinement or finish of the picture begins to be paid for by the loss of the faintest shadow of an idea, that instant all refinement or finish is an excrescence and a deformity."¹

This paragraph so uncompromisingly expresses the idea against which the lovers of the Dutch School still have to fight, that I shall venture to use it in the following pages as a kind of text, in spite of what I believe to be the fact, that its author himself would have greatly modified its terms had he awaited maturity of judgment before publishing the first volume of *Modern Painters*.

"Most pictures of the Dutch School, excepting always those of Rubens, Vandyke and Rembrandt, are ostentatious exhibitions of the artist's power of speech, the clear and vigorous elocution of useless and senseless words." In other words, "Dutch painting is mere technique," as we are so often told to-day.

Is this true in any sense whatever?

The best way to answer such an assertion is : (1) to recount the origin of the characteristic Dutch School, (2) to describe the ideals of its best masters, and (3) to consider their success in carrying out those ideals.

For our present purposes Dutch painting begins with the seventeenth century. It would not be difficult to prove—indeed, it is now beginning to be generally acknowledged—that the natural gift of the Dutchmen for expression in paint was one of the chief factors in the glory of that early school which extended from Haarlem almost to the gates of Paris. But the seductions of Italy, and that craving for the exotic which has so often been the ruin of art, supervened, and turned the sixteenth century into an interregnum of insincerity; during which painters were obeying a disastrous fashion, instead of listening to the counsels of their own emotions. It was not entirely bare of great art, of course, for Antonie Mor's career began and ended in it, and towards the close the purifying effect of portrait painting began to dispel the fumes of those poisonous industries for which Cornelis van Haarlem, Marten Heemskerck, and others like them, were responsible. But on the whole the sixteenth century was a period of hiber-

¹ *Modern Painters*, vol. i. p. 9. Edition of 1888.

nation, during which the faculties which had illuminated the fifteenth were at least asleep ; and it was not until William of Orange had been thirty years in his grave that the sap began to rise in earnest and the tree of art to put forth leaves and flowers.

Opinions vary as to the immediate origin of the grand epoch. To some, who have noticed that great imaginative developments have often followed periods of storm and danger, Dutch painting in the seventeenth century embodies the reaction from Dutch agony and rage in the sixteenth. To others it seems a natural result of peace and returning hope, and its form to be determined by the configuration of Holland and the organization of Dutch society. The truth, probably, is that to a combination of these immediate causes with the results upon character of the whole history, so much of it geographical, of Holland, must be ascribed the nature of her art during the generations when it was truly national. The events of the sixteenth century brought matters to a head. The sufferings of the United Provinces under the Spaniards developed an extreme energy of character, while the configuration of the soil and the social arrangements put neither difficulty nor temptation in the artists' way. But these forces did not actually produce great art. Conditions equally favourable in such respects have existed elsewhere and among peoples naturally artistic, without leading to notable achievements. The important difference between Holland after her conquest of a practical independence and, let us say, France after the fall of the Bastille, lay in the fact that the latter nation followed a model while the former did not.

Many things combined to make the French turn to Greece and Rome for an aesthetic lead. They had dethroned a church and sought a substitute in the symbolism which had sufficed for Pericles. They had destroyed a monarchy, and looked for political ideals to the great republics of the past. They had overturned society and banished its ambitions and emblems. It was almost inevitable, with changes like these and with the sudden elevation of the half-educated to the guidance of affairs, that a superficial but plausible idea like the revival of classical perfection should capture their aesthetic imaginations. It was fatal to art. Men of genius contrived, of course, to show their powers in spite of exotic forms, just as Mantegna had done three cen-

turies before, but permanent French characteristics and ambitions found no general expression between 1790 and 1815.

With Holland it was otherwise. The Dutch character had been formed by centuries of conflict with the forces of nature. The soil of Holland only exists at all because generations of Dutchmen have been patient, sturdy and self-reliant. The incessant war with the sea and the Rhine had, by a slow process of selection, turned the whole population into men who would not accept a foreign ideal or an exotic scheme of life. They had made their own country, and meant to keep it for themselves. They had expelled the Spaniard and thrown his gewgaws after him. They had determined that their churches and their homes should be Dutch, and that habits of the South should be reversed because they were Southern habits. The peace of Münster was not signed until 1648, sixty-four years after the death of William the Silent; and the men who signed it had been familiar with the Spanish aggression only at its ebb, which coincided with the flood-tide of their own independence. It is difficult for an Englishman, with his centuries of domestic peace behind him, to realize that the Dutch painters whose names are almost household words, were the sons of men who had lived through the sieges of Leyden and Alkmaar, who remembered the "Spanish Fury" and the fantastic valour of the Spanish infantry, who had seen Alva and Orange, and had shaken off, like a nightmare, the dread of Philip and his Inquisition. Here and there, no doubt, the troubles of Holland are echoed in her art—a few battle scenes, and scenes of rape and pillage, find their places in most great galleries. The picturesque accoutrements, too, of the seventeenth century man of war ensure his presence on a goodly number of panels, even by such peaceful creators as Terborch, Metsu, and De Hooghe. But on the whole the preoccupation is with tranquillity, domesticity, and the daily routine of a people providing in security for the evolution of their families and the rotation of their crops.

To resume, then, ages of industrious conflict with the forces of nature had turned those who tilled the delta of the Rhine into a very strenuous race indeed. A hundred years of struggle with a southern nation and southern ways had fired their imagination and made them ready for artistic and intellectual development on a large scale. Hatred

of their enemy and his ideas had turned them aside from that field of art in which all Europe, including themselves, had once done so much. Here, then, we have conditions which invariably produce great art : on the one hand an awakened and excited intelligence seeking an outlet ; on the other, an entirely new problem pressing for solution.

The foundation of all good art is sincerity. Art is the expression of emotion, or passion, to use a nobler word, in some medium appealing to the senses. Insincerity is therefore its negation. Nothing done because some one else has done it before, or because it is difficult, or because one thinks it may excite emotion in those who look upon it, or even because it contains some purely intellectual appeal, can preserve any real vitality. True works of art are the things in which we enjoy the real emotions of those who make them. They are the unlying records by which we men of to-day can appreciate the humanity of those from whom we descend. They are entirely vitiated by insincerity. An art founded upon the perfections of another age, an art governing itself, not by the genuine preferences of those who practise it, but by the examples of men who burnt with different ambitions, can never be really alive. At best it pleases only as a feat.

If we accept this idea, we must confess that a clean slate, such as the Dutch painters had before them in 1600, was the first step towards a fresh record in art. It is now difficult, if not impossible, to allot the credit for the new departure. Whether the supply created the demand or the demand the supply, is, however, a petty matter of chronology. It is quite certain that if the Dutch mind had not been attuned to the new idea of setting domestic life on the pedestal hitherto occupied by history and theology, the substitution would never have taken place. That it was so attuned, and very thoroughly indeed, we know not only from the popularity of the new art, but also from the comparative neglect in which the supreme genius of the country—whose imagination lingered among the old themes with such pertinacity that we sometimes whisper to ourselves, “Was Rembrandt a Jew?”—passed the greater part of his life. The modern tendency is still to credit individuals too much with new developments. Even the peculiar line taken by the genius of Rembrandt has been referred to the example of Elsheimer, although it may fairly be argued that

a partial and temporary coincidence of taste was all that their works prove. The logical inference from the fact that the new theories as to what art should *do* were first embodied in the work of second and third rate painters like Adriaen van der Venne, Pieter Codde and Willem Duyster, is that those men were not originators, but scouts; men sent on ahead by Public Opinion to *tater le terrain*. But the point is hardly worth discussion, for the only thing that matters is undeniable, namely, that by the end of the first quarter of the seventeenth century a body of well equipped Dutch painters, with a good, but not too good, technical tradition behind them, were face to face with an ideal which was at once national and new. If we look fairly at any of the great periods of art, we shall find that parallel conditions to these were always present. They can be stated still more simply by saying that an awakened artistic imagination always produces fine work when compelled to be sincere.

As for the dignity of Dutch ideals, it varied with individual masters, just as that of the Italians varied. Personally, I am unable to see why "the burning messages of prophecy, delivered by the stammering lips of infants," should be set on a higher plane than creations of exquisite beauty, born of the union of a profound sense of Nature's universal rightness with an eye for the expressive power of art. Duccio, and Giotto laboured for the church and spent their force on mysteries which neither they nor their patrons understood. Their work has the charm that so often belongs to immature things. Their attitude to the themes on which their brushes were employed was that of a child to history. A child is logical and dramatic, but vague among abstractions. So were Duccio and Giotto. Their "stammering" consisted in turning large ideas into familiar symbols and clothing those with the dramatic force which so often goes with immaturity of knowledge. Forceful *naïveté* is no longer possible to us. We are compelled to treat the dogmas of our faith in an abstract and therefore non-pictorial way. That we cannot use the imagery of extreme youth any more is, however, no justification for confusing it with revelation, or for setting work in which it prevails above consummate things.

What was the Dutch ideal? Was it low, as a matter of fact? Dr. Johnson's flank attack at the Thrale auction occurs to me. "Gen-

tllemen, we are not here to sell a parcel of old vats and barrels ; we are here to sell the potentiality of growing rich beyond the dreams of avarice ! ” So with the Dutch painters ; their subjects were not silk dresses and drunken boors, young women at spinets and old ones gutting fish, cows and pigs, horses full of labour and groups of oaks. Their subjects—or subject, for they had but one—was the beauty of human life lived under conditions which made it free. Holland at peace, Holland with its men, women and children pursuing the careers to which they were born, was the objective basis of their art. Their idea was that of a healthy Zola. They set themselves to record life as it was, and in so doing to criticize it in the only fair and effective way. The plastic arts cannot dive far beneath the surface. The painter can deal effectively only with what is familiar. He need not expose himself to the danger which besets the literary realist in a misreading of motives. His business is with phenomena, which he must not over-rationalize or overload. The falsity of the conscious mental condition on which Zola embroiders a drama has no parallel in a painted record. The description of a ball at the Tuileries, in *La Curée*, combines a marvellous veracity to externals with a fantastically wrong-headed view of the emotions seething in the breasts of the company. Hogarth sometimes fell into the same error, but the Dutchmen never. They wished above all things to be veracious, and to tell only what they knew. They neither preached nor moralized, but left the facts to do both. Their pictures are the best of chroniclers, for they supply that truth of background which is the greatest difficulty of the historian. By their means the look of Dutch life in the seventeenth century is better known than that of any other country, including our own.

The field embraced by their ambitions was not wide, but they explored it thoroughly. They confined themselves to the society they knew, but they made their descriptions ample. Their's was the most various of all the older schools. The modern demand for novelty, for new problems with new solutions, was not yet born. An artist was thought to have done enough in that direction if each of his creations were at peace with itself. He was not expected to avoid repetition, either of his own work or even that of others. The greatest painters

of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were often stereotyped, repeating one design again and again with changes involving no thought whatever. It was never so with the Dutchmen. Perhaps the demand for newness was in the air, but I prefer to believe their variety to be the result of their ideal. When you set out to describe society, you must be various. For the moment I do not want to allude to particular artists any more than I need, but as an example of what I mean by Dutch variety I may take the work of Philips Wouwerman. Wouwerman died at the age of forty-nine, but at least 600 pictures by him are known. No one has been more unjustly treated by those critics who decide, with frank arbitrariness, what a picture ought to be, and then damn or praise accordingly. "Nonsense pictures, a mere assemblage of things to be imitated, items without a meaning," one especially shallow analyser calls them. What are their real qualities? In the first place, design. Every picture by Wouwerman embodies a design, a pattern of line and mass which hangs together and explains the reason for its own existence. In one sense there may be little variety in the pattern, but we must remember that any change in a design involves a whole sequence of other changes, just as the introduction of a new cadence in a musical phrase requires the re-arrangement of the whole. Secondly, Wouwerman is a first-rate executant; he has both the power to say what he wishes and the conscience which ensures the use of that power. Thirdly, he is faithful to the phenomena with which he is concerned. His business is with outdoor life as he saw it in Holland and North-Western Germany in the middle of the seventeenth century. The sincerity he brought to its illustration is transparent. We may not take much interest in the sporadic fighting which then still ruffled the country, or even in the hawkings and horse fairs and sales of fish or cattle, but they all complete our knowledge of how our race lived and thought two centuries and a half ago. Combine what we are told by Wouwerman with what we know from Terborch, Metsu, Jan Steen, Adriaen van Ostade, Teniers, De Hooghe, Ruisdael and Hobbema, and we get the materials for a vision of Dutch life in which we can implicitly believe.

It cannot be too often asserted that all genuine art is the expression, *in a suitable medium*, of emotion sincerely felt by the artist; and that

the test implied in such a description will, in the long run, supersede all others. But granting for a moment that an external test may be used, how would the men I have just mentioned support it? So far as I know, the external tests you can apply are these: does so-and-so give pleasure? does he add to our knowledge? and, does he teach? Now, it is evident that the first of these questions can be put aside, not because the giving of pleasure is not a worthy aim, but because there is no reason why it should not be combined with the other two. As to teaching, in Ruskin's sense, it amounts to this, that a painter shall also be a prophet, that he shall put forward theories of conduct, assertions about our origin and end, and symbols of mysteries—which nevertheless remain mysteries; that he shall, in short, drive us along certain paths without being able to show that there only virtue is to be found. We are so strangely made that we are all apt to give precedence to a mind which can cut itself loose from the knowable; but (unless we are to accept pleasure, after all, as the final and only test), we must resist that impulse, and accept additions to knowledge as the only *external* objective of the artist. The Dutchmen painted the social history of their country for a century, and in doing so gave us a document which will lose its value only with existence.

There remains the question of the moral dignity of the Dutch character and therefore of the art in which it is embodied. Granting that truth, objective as well as subjective fidelity, is a pictorial virtue, does the kind of truth told by the Dutch painters strengthen their claim on our sympathies or does it not?

Let us look at the panorama they have left us.

I do not see how any one can be widely familiar with the school without conceiving a deep respect for the life it records. It is significant that the petty sides of human nature, the more heartless dissipations, the more accidental adventures and tendencies, are left to the inferior artists. Holland has always been a frank country. The large families and small flimsy houses have there made impossible silences and privacies which seem to us a part of nature's scheme. Dutch painters were not prevented by prudery, or rather, let me say, by a severe convention, from offering their clients pages appealing to the mere animal instinct. They were restrained by a just sense of art and

by a fine eye for the broad, permanent forces of society. Even Jan Steen, who turns up the seamy side of life oftener than others, never paints degradation with sympathy. He shows how the peasant lived—how he passed the hours left to him after his cows were milked, his dykes secured, and his crops at home. He shirks nothing, but through it all he weaves the thread of generous humanity, carrying its load for one generation and passing it on lighter to the next. The school, as a whole, is free from any tendency to allow the non-aesthetic value of any particular class of incident to give it prominence in their list of subjects. The relations of the sexes, for example, are so interesting in themselves, that art cannot make use of them beyond a certain point without committing suicide. You may paint a love scene, but you must not carry it too far, or curiosity about the fact will supersede interest in its artistic treatment. So with other exciting themes. Jan de Baen painted the mutilated bodies of the De Witts as they hung on the gibbet at the Hague; Rembrandt painted Dr. Deyman dissecting the brain of a disembowelled corpse, producing a superb page of technique in doing so.¹ But such things were not in the pattern of the school. The Dutch painters aimed—whether consciously or not is neither here nor there—at leaving behind them a true picture of an admirable society: which brings us back to our point that it was an admirable society.

Again, there are the great portraits—the portraits of individual men and women, and the famous groups of archers, regenten, regentessen, and what not. All these point to one conclusion, and their meaning is unmistakable. The Dutchman of the great century was neither handsome nor elegant, he was neither poet nor dreamer. His imagination was robust and essentially practical. He cheerfully faced the prospect of long years of fighting and hard work, when they promised to rid his country of the southron and to add millions of broad acres to its surface. He swept out the Spaniard and suppressed the Haarlemer Meer just as coolly as he now prepares to abolish the Zuider Zee. Compared to the Italian or to the

¹ In his other anatomy lesson, Rembrandt took measures to prevent the "subject" from attracting the attention due to Tulp, but even there it is difficult to look upon the canvas with eyes for its art alone.

Elizabethan Englishman, he was dull, massive, narrow, and intolerant. But he took long views. His eyes were clear, and within his own horizon they saw what there was to be seen. His aspect towards those flowery sides of life which mean so much to men of southern blood, was one of apparent indifference. We can find no evidence that woman's beauty appealed to him. Pretty women are rare in Holland, but they are rarer still in Dutch pictures, and none of the national fashions are based on a desire to enhance beauty or to bring out its characteristic lines. The very young Dutchwoman is often a fine animal, tall, well set up, muscular and supple. For years it was my habit, during annual visits to the Hague, to have breakfast at Scheveningen and sit an hour or so on the beach before beginning the day. The crowds of bathers gave one every opportunity for a true estimate of the Dutch physique. I was often reminded of the famous letter in which Lady Mary Wortley describes her visit to the ladies' bath at Adrianople; for beautiful figures frequently atoned for the plainest of faces. But the Dutch take thought to deny every charm of limb and torso when they dress, and this seems to have been their habit always. A people with such tendencies can have little romantic about it. It cannot be a race of castle-builders, inventing ideals to pursue. The imagination must work by selection from experience, not by projection to unseen fields ahead. The faces immortalized in such pictures as the "Shooter's Feast" of Van der Helst, or the "Syndics" of Rembrandt, or the "St. George's Guild" of Frans Hals, entirely bear out this idea. In every feature they declare capacity for the work on hand, capacity to control and manipulate, to find the line of least resistance or to stand like a wall and defy. And the female groups—the Regents of the Spinning-House of Hals, for instance—show similar qualities. All these heads breathe a character diametrically opposed to that of the Celtic races. They are full of intellect, but of an intellect which deliberately prefers the most familiar of truths to the most dazzling and romantic of fictions.

If we turn to those pages from daily life which are the staple of the Dutch painters, we find their spirit determined by the character we read in the portraits. The objective aim is to make a true presentment.

The Dutchman does not execute for the sake of execution. He has selected for the sake of truth, and designed for the sake of art, before execution begins. Of any detail in a picture by one of the greater masters you may safely assert that he put it in, that he placed it, shaped it, and coloured it, for the sake of art and truth; that he painted it as well as he could for the enjoyment of his own *virtuosité*. The real initial motive of every true artist is, of course, to create beauty; but putting that question aside for the present as one not raised just now, I repeat that the aim of the Dutchman was to present the highest truths he *knew*, which were those of human life as it was lived by the strenuous men and women of his time and country. It is "the part of the judicious critic carefully to distinguish between what is language and what is thought, and to rank and praise pictures chiefly for the latter, considering the former as a totally inferior excellence, and one which cannot be compared with nor weighed against thought in any way or in any degree whatsoever." Yes: but there are thoughts proper to be declared in words, and thoughts proper to be declared in paint, or in musical sounds, or in building materials, and the true artist will never confound one with the other. A conception of eternity may be a great thought, but plastic art cannot express it. It can be suggested only in a medium which leaves the imagination free, while those of art are essentially concrete and finite. To ignore the thought which goes to the arranging of a picture, and to the harmonizing of everything done upon the chosen surface with that arrangement, is to show that the power of art has not been felt, that its nature and scope have not been understood. The author of *Modern Painters* always writes as if the only ideas conveyable by paint were associative ideas—historical, religious, scientific—and ignores the fact that the true artist works not by association, but by the direct appeal of his medium. The contrast he seeks to establish between the early Italians and the later Dutch is really not one of art at all. It has to do with his own personal opinions as to how an artist should apply his art. Fra Angelico would have painted like Metsu if he could. It may, indeed, be quite safely asserted that he thought more about execution, in the sense in which Ruskin uses the word, than any of the greater Dutchmen. All the better Dutch painters are full of

thought, of exactly the same kind as that which breathes from "three pen strokes of Raffaello." No one can seriously assert that the three pen strokes in question could be pregnant with anything more than an aesthetic value ; the poise of a torso, the turn of a limb, the carriage of a head. In Raphael these three lines would be ultimately destined to association with matters we have all been trained to revere, while in a Dutchman their concern would be with familiar things. But that makes no difference to their art. Raphael and Metsu alike are engaged in building up a structure of line, mass and rhythmical lights and shadows, which shall end in unity, and both are employing their thoughts in the same way. That one is the servant of an ancient church and its head, and the other of a sturdy people, determined to get down to the bed rock for the foundation of a new order, is no justification for asserting a difference in kind between their arts. Nothing is more significant than the phrase so often heard : I don't care about this or that class of art. No man has time enough to steep himself deeply in the ideas of all the schools, or to know all the masters as he knows his favourites. But the man who knows one real school, who truly appreciates the qualities on which its greatness depends, will understand and respect all the others. If he can truly taste the *art* of Michelangelo, he will not jeer at Jan Steen, but will confess that, different in kind and in dignity though their themes may be, their art, their use of the language which knits generation to generation through the ages, is essentially the same.

CHAPTER II

The Painters of Holland

So far I have said nothing about Dutch art in detail. The points discussed have had to do with the uses to which art may be put, rather than with the nature of the thing itself. I have endeavoured to suggest that even if we confine ourselves to the moral or intellectual ideas contained in pictures, much more is to be said for the Dutch than we are apt to suppose. The Italian served the Church and the *grand seigneur*; the Dutchman, domestic life and the bourgeois; there we have the origin of the contrast in externals between their respective arts. When we desert externals and make esoteric comparisons, we get on surer ground, but there, again, we find ourselves driven to similar conclusions. The Dutch were not only supreme executants—meaning by that term realizers of conceptions previously formed in the mind—they were first-rate conceivers too. Putting aside such questions as have to do with the moral dignity, historical value, or didactic energy of a subject, and confining ourselves to design, illumination, colour, and handling, that is to those elements of a pictorial creation which embody and convey aesthetic emotion, I shall try to show that the Dutch painters were the most universal of all.

The distinction of a painter is the ability to find a pictorial equivalent for his own emotions, and therefore for those of other people. His procedure is to select themes because they touch his sympathies in themselves, and then to clothe them in a garment of art which shall be in perfect harmony with, and shall therefore enhance, their sympathetic appeal. The man who feels no relation between an emotion and the materials of art is not an artist. His work will be governed by ideas which have no essential connexion with art, ideas of actuality, or archaeology, or science, or ideas belonging to some art

other than the one he practises. He may, for instance, believe that a dramatic picture is necessarily a good one, whereas it may be as dramatic as you please, and yet not a work of art within its own four walls at all. The first thing a painter has to do, then, is to select a subject which, given his own idiosyncrasy and that of paint, will lead to aesthetic unity. Subjects dictated seldom lead to good results because dictation is against the spirit of art. When a painter accepts a theme from some one else, he does away with one of the essential, or, at least, desirable, stages in the evolution of a work of art. The first stage in creation is design. Many artists, no doubt—not always the best ones—fuse all the stages into one act of the will. They see their conception at once—design, colour, illumination, handling—all complete in the mind, and each bringing its quota to the final unity. It rises upon them like a vision, and nothing remains but realization. Others build it up gradually, fitting each successive stage to the last, and modifying enormously as a new aesthetic unity has to be won after each addition. Of the first class I imagine Rembrandt to have been the supreme example; of the second, perhaps Raphael. But however inextricable the various stages may be in fact, it will be convenient for our present purposes to take them as separable, and to suppose that every painter thinks of his picture as a linear design in the first place, then as an arrangement of shade, shadow and light, then as a colour harmony, and lastly as a piece of significant and vivacious texture built up by handling.

But before attempting to follow up these several lines, it will be convenient to specify those Dutch painters—all, happily, save two, represented in the Peel Collection—upon whom I shall chiefly have to depend for illustration. They need not be very numerous:—Metsu, Terborch, Vermeer, De Hooghe, Jan Steen, Adriaen van Ostade, Willem and Adriaen van de Velde, Wouwerman, Hobbema, Jakob Ruisdael, Albert Cuijp, Philips de Koninck, and Frans Hals. I omit Rembrandt altogether for the present. He, like Shakespeare, belongs neither to a period nor a locality, but has his place in the small group of artists whose imaginations both embraced and looked down upon the conditions and ideas to which they were born.

Restricting ourselves at first to the figure painters, and to those who dealt with the politer sides of society, let us see how Metsu, Ter-



A FAMILY PORTRAIT. By Gonzales Coques. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstaengl.





THE TRIUMPH OF SILENUS. By Rubens. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstengl.





THE DUET. *By G. Metsu. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstaengl.*





THE MUSIC LESSON. *By G. Metsu. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstaengl.*



borch, De Hooghe and Vermeer understood their relation to art, and first to that initial beauty of painting—a good design.

Gabriel Metsu, the most consummate of all the Dutchmen, the man in whom the greatest number of subtle beauties met and mingled in the most delicate proportions, is one of those rare artists in whom a sense of form is an imperious instinct. His pictures vary ingeniously in general aspect, for he never became stereotyped. His execution progressed steadily from the beginning to the end, from the somewhat metallic tightness of his early years to the unrivalled combination of breadth with subtlety, of manipulative with creative elements, which marks his final style. But his manifest delight in execution did not make him forget design. From first to last his pictures are organic things. One line implies another, one mass answers to another. There is a pervading rhythm to be enjoyed in their depth as well as their superficialities. Sir Frederic Burton says of him: "His compositions are faultless in arrangement and in balance of parts. In respect of chiaroscuro, if that term be applied, as it often is with us, not merely to the management of light, shadow, and reflex, but to that of lights and darks generally in their mutual relations and values as local colours, Metsu was a master of the first order." Plenty of opportunities for the study of his art are afforded by London, for the National Gallery has three good examples and the Wallace Collection five; while two more, including perhaps his masterpiece, are in Mr. Alfred Beit's collection in Park Lane. Of all these, there is only one in which Metsu's genius for design falters and sinks for the moment to taste in arrangement. This is Mr. Beit's "Reading the Letter." Here we have a sort of *tableau-vivant* carried out in paint. The figures are cut out, without *liaison* to one another or to their background, and no fusing accidents of chiaroscuro have been contrived. It is, nevertheless, a delicious picture, and its unusual aspect may be accounted for by supposing it the portrait of a place as well as of a person. The companion picture,¹ the "Letter Writer," shows all Metsu's artistry at its best. The design is perfect. It begins by founding itself on the probabilities, so that untutored eyes may easily suppose veracity to be its only aim.

¹ They both once belonged to the collection left by the late Mrs. Hope, of Deepdene, to Lord Francis Pelham-Clinton, from which they were acquired by Mr. Beit.

There is a touch more of elegance in the pose than the act of writing leads to, otherwise the rare art of concealing the most elaborate art cannot show a more consummate achievement. The red picture in the Peel Collection known as "The Duet," the "Letter Writer Surprised," and the "Woman Selling Fish," of the Wallace Collection are all faultless in the same way. They each embody a beautiful design, in which the linear pattern, the movement of the light, and the come and go of mass and surface, corroborate each other into a convincing unity. Metsu's design is like music, or a live animal. It supplies its own finality, which you cannot interfere with or modify, but must enjoy as it is. The architectonic dignity admitted by such themes as those treated by the Italians of the previous two centuries is precluded by his subjects, but otherwise his power to design, to create a whole, is as great as theirs.

What is here said of Metsu may be applied, with a very slight modification, to Terborch. Metsu seems to me the finer artist, partly through the greater breadth and comprehension of his handling, which does not concern us for the moment; but also through his deeper sense of unity, and the greater flexibility and elasticity of his imagination. I have seen no Terborch in which the elements of the design are so completely wedded to each other and compelled to work for the common good as they are in the red Metsu of the National Gallery or in Mr. Beit's "Letter Writer." Compared to Metsu's, Terborch's design is skilful arrangement; but even so it is above the level of all but the greatest men of other schools. The same kind of power is exhibited by De Hooghe. He, like Terborch, is without the extraordinary unity of vision, in matters of form, of Metsu. His pictures are arranged rather than conceived, just as the earlier Madonnas of Bellini are arranged. The sense of inevitability we feel before those rare designs which appear to have sprung full grown from their creator's brain, is not to be felt before even the best conceptions of De Hooghe—such, for instance, as the one which England lost to America when the Hope Collection was dispersed. But if without this last and greatest quality, they are nevertheless monuments of taste in arrangement, and excellent foundations for that other unity brought them by their wonderful sunlight.

Jan Vermeer of Delft, who unhappily had not risen above our modern horizons when Sir Robert Peel was collecting his pictures, was another extraordinary master of design, when he chose. He was vastly more unequal than Metsu, rising to heights untouched by any other Dutchman of his class, one day; and sinking to little more than common-places the next. In his best designs, such as the "Dairywoman" of the Six Collection; the "Soldier and the Laughing Girl," belonging to Mrs. Joseph; the "Dutch Lady at a Window" of the New York Museum, the linear pattern is almost as fine as the best of Metsu's. But he often fell below this level, becoming at times one of the most formal and recipe-obeying members of his school. In what other man's work will you find such a contrast in essentials as that between the famous "View of Delft," at the Hague, and the "Artist in his Studio" of the Czernin Collection? The one all warmth, force, and simplicity; the other all contrivance and elaboration. That by the way, however. My present object is to class Vermeer with Metsu, De Hooghe, and Terborch, and to point out how in matters of design they were governed by ideas of style, dignity and unity only to be distinguished by national character from those of the great Italians. Such a picture as the Garvagh "Madonna" in the National Gallery is to be set apart from Vermeer's "Dairy-woman" or Metsu's "Letter Writer" chiefly by the accident of its external purpose. The Italian demand was for sacred subjects, and such subjects had to be conventionalized. Otherwise Raphael¹ worked in the same spirit as the two Dutchmen.

It would not serve our immediate purpose to contrast these four Dutchmen as chiaroscurists. Speaking broadly, they are all guided by the same idea in their treatment of light—they are essentially objective. Terborch prefers the discreet illumination of a lady's boudoir; Metsu ventures on the bolder daylight of the salon; while Vermeer, and still more De Hooghe, admit the sun into their combinations. In spite of fidelity to effect, however, they never forget their pattern, and no painter has surpassed them in wedding unity to clarity, in preserving contact and *liaison* and yet avoiding confusion. It is the same with their colour. Vermeer is more personal than the other three, but with him we have to make allowances, for he

¹ Or Giulio Romano, as some critics believe.

seems to have used one pigment, at least—a yellow—which has proved unstable. On the whole they accept colour just as they accept light. The Rembrandtesque, and Titianesque, determination to make a slave of it, is absent; here, as in chiaroscuro, actuality is the first condition.

As for our last element, that of texture, or handling, here again our four men are models of taste, sanity and proficiency. Metsu is the finest executant, because the relation between his executive units—his brush strokes—and his scale, shows a finer instinct than those of the other three. The units—the stitches, if I may put it so—of Terborch, are too small, those of Vermeer and De Hooch often too large, for the stuff they are weaving. In saying this, however, I must not forget that Metsu's enamelled period, when brushing was not perceptible at all, lasted a considerable time, and that his handling is only to be seen in perfection in such creations of his maturity as Mr. Beit's "Letter Writer," the National Gallery "Duet," and "Drowsy Landlady," and the Wallace "Fish-seller." Putting aside precedence among themselves, our chosen four all understood the value of an agreeable texture, of a handling which should be at once indicative of the objective qualities of the things represented and in harmony with the idea to be expressed. The notion that what is called their finish was a mere question of labour, that if they could they would have obliterated all traces of the tool, is, of course, absurd. The mere fact that, as time went on and experience grew, they allowed their brushing to become more and more visible shows that they deliberately accepted it as an addition to their means of expression. Only the mediocrities—men like Schalcken—adopted a mechanical finish as part of their aim. The others understood that everything done upon a panel by a painter can help his thought, and were not so foolish as to polish out of existence such an eloquent dialect as that of the handler.

Mutatis mutandis, most of what I have now been saying of these four men may be applied to the rest of those whose names are quoted on page 16. Jan Steen was seldom quite happy in his scale, in the quantitative relation between his treatment of a subject and his surface. To this, however, the Peel example is an exception. Adriaen and Isaak van Ostade, Wouwerman, Adriaen van de Velde, often fell into the same fault, and produced works which make us feel that no dis-

tance is the right one from which to enjoy them. A Metsu focusses at once. You never have the slightest hesitation in deciding how far away you should be when you look at it. You take up your place before the red "Duet" as unerringly as before the "Bacchus and Ariadne," or Moroni's "Tailor," or Rembrandt's "Woman Wading." So you do with a Hobbema, and often, though not always, with a Ruisdael. This question of establishing a right quantitative relation between (1) the parts of a picture, and (2) a picture and the spectator, is one of those points which are difficult to prove. We have no doubt whatever that the occupation of the surface we see in De Hooghe's "Interior," in the Peel Collection, is the result of a much better aesthetic judgment than that, let us say, of Wouwerman's "Stable," in the same collection; but beyond saying that one focusses, appeals to us as a whole at one point of distance, while the other does not, we can assert nothing. And yet success in this particular is the beginning of all good design. Passing the Dutchmen in review before one's mind's eye, they fall into their places with extraordinary promptitude from this standpoint. One requires no thinking to know that our four, and Hobbema, and, of course, Rembrandt in his maturity, never fail, and that a certain number of others fail but seldom, the whole school standing at a higher level than any other in this aspect of its work. It is not a question of execution. It is a question of the most immaterial and abstract relations between the human imagination and its means of expression. It is, of course, exactly the same question as any piece of design asks us—the decoration of a bookbinding, for instance. "Am I fit? do I suit the shape, size and texture of the surface on which I exist?" That is the query, and, obviously, it has to do with decisions come to before execution begins.

This matter of focus is at the root of the charm exercised by many otherwise slight works of art. English miniatures, for instance, occupy their surface and draw our eyes to it with a curious felicity. Looking at them we feel a satisfaction, an absence of any desire to go farther and fare otherwise, comparable to that felt when an object sails well into the field of an exactly focussed telescope. Cosway, Engleheart, Smart, and the rest of them have an instinctively just

perception of a quantitative relation between a surface and the objects to be put upon it. And so it was with the finer Dutchmen, so that we are invaded by an active sense of physical repose before their better pictures.

It may be said that in all this discussion I am but repeating in different words the doctrine of Ruskin quoted at the head of my first chapter, and showing that the Dutch excelled only in matters of execution, while, either from their own inclination or from the absence of demand, they left the higher thoughts of man untouched by their art. If I have made myself understood, the reader will see the answer to any such assertion. A good picture may be divided into three constituents, namely, subject, artistic conception, scientific execution. All experience shows that of these three, subject, by itself, is by far the least important. True art can dignify any subject, can do without a subject altogether, can turn a horrible object into a fine subject, or work any other miracle of a similar kind; while in the absence of art, no subject, no matter how momentous in itself, can give vitality. It would be easy enough, were it necessary, to name hundreds of pictures treating great events and great ideas with vigour from some non-aesthetic standpoint¹ which are nevertheless utterly dumb and uninteresting, simply because their authors have failed to give an aesthetic equivalent for their religious, dramatic, or historical appeal. It is clear that the charm of a true work of art cannot be referred to the presence of some quality which fails to charm in a *quasi* work of art. If it does not succeed in saving the latter from death, it cannot be the cause of vitality in the former. The truth is that art alone gives vitality to anything which sets out to be a work of art. The early efforts of Giotto are still alive, not because they are "burning messages of prophecy, delivered by the stammering lips of infants," but because, when compared to other messages of their time, the lips do *not* stammer, but find instead curiously vigorous forms for the conveyance of their message. Giotto was a great potential artist; through his ignorance and inexperience we can descry the inborn faculty for devising an aesthetic equivalent to

¹ The pictures of Benjamin Robert Haydon, for example.

dramatic or religious emotion, and for translating abstract ideas into forms of line and colour.

From all this it will be seen that in my opinion any attempt to fix the relative dignity of the Dutch and the Italian Schools by a comparison of their themes, is beside the mark. The Italians did not express themselves in their subjects, but in their treatment of those subjects, that is in their art. The Italians of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were essentially irreligious, pleasure-loving, wedded to the present and free from the spirit of men who suffer for their faith. They followed their religion and the tradition which made it almost the only subject for art; but the spirit in which they worked was neither devotional nor inquisitive. It was that of men who accepted what they had been told, and made it the basis of an art in which they could find an outlet for their purely aesthetic passion. If we are to compare the Dutchmen with the Italians by their subjects, we shall have to begin by confessing that the former were sincere, while the latter were, for the most part, not. It is an abuse of words to call the sentiment which breathes from the work of Filippo Lippi, Botticelli, Perugino, Pollajuolo, Signorelli, Ghirlandajo, devotional. Its sincerity is artistic sincerity, the passion really expressed is an aesthetic, and not a religious, passion. The fervour of Duccio, and Angelico, and perhaps Filippino, was rare in the schools to which they belonged, as rare as the inspiration of Dante or Savonarola. That we choose to call the subjects on which Florentine studios were engaged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, higher than those facts and tendencies of human life on which the Dutchmen of a later age were employed, is no ground for the arguments which have been based upon it.

On the other hand, we must not push our own argument too far. The Dutch are undeniably lacking in one artistic quality which must not be left out of the account. It is a quality difficult to define, although we have several names for it. Sometimes we call it idealism, sometimes poetry, sometimes imagination, forcing this last word away from its etymological meaning.¹ Idealism, perhaps, is the best word, for the

¹ If imagination be the faculty for creating a mental *imago*, then Mr. Rudyard Kipling has more of it than other men. If he were a painter, we could fancy him painting, literally, from an absent model, whose image was still vivid on his retina!

quality has its birth in the setting of a higher standard than that of average nature in the imitative elements of a work of art. This was contrary to the Dutch genius. We find no objective idealism in the works of the greater masters of Holland, nothing to answer to the idealism of Giorgione or Titian, or even of Van Dyck. Idealism of this sort is an aesthetic virtue, not *because* it makes men handsomer and women more beautiful than they are, but because, in doing so, it raises the aesthetic level too, and compels a grander design and a finer colour than we should otherwise be given. The Dutch are good colourists, and their better men put a picture together with consummate felicity. But to justify—to live up to—such design and colour as we see in a great Titian, for instance, you must lift your people correspondingly above the smaller particularities of fact. The whole difference between Italy and Holland in this connexion may be learnt by comparing two pictures which are now together in the National Gallery—I mean the Cobham “Ariosto,”¹ so happily rescued from emigration, and the “Rembrandt,” by himself (No. 672), which has been one of our National treasures for more than forty years. It is just, as well as easy, to compare these two, for not only do they hang under one roof, they are so conceived that we may feel sure we do no wrong to Rembrandt if we take his conscious intention as identical with that of Titian, or to Titian if we reverse the process. Each man set out to create a work of art in which the best features of humanity should be surrounded with the best accidents, and each set about it in the same way. Each saw

¹ That the old tradition is right and that here we have a portrait of the author of “Orlando,” is my humble opinion. Not only that, I think the picture numbered 636 and now ascribed to Palma, is also Ariosto, as it used to be called. The points of identity between those two pictures and the woodcut in the 1640 edition of “Orlando” are too numerous to be fortuitous. First, as to the two pictures. The features in two readings of one face are consistent with each other. The cut of hair, beard and moustache is the same in both. Both men wear linen shirts cut to the same height, quilted clothes of rich material, and gold chains of identical fashion. They are both about the same age, and that the age of Ariosto when the pictures were painted. Behind one of them appear the bays of the poet. If we turn to the woodcut, we again find identities in decisive matters. Here the poet is older and more worn, but his features, the shape of his head, the fashion of hair and dress, are again consistent with the two earlier portraits. All these similarities and the absence of any intrusive difference requiring to be explained away, seem to show that here, as with the “Ambassadors” of Holbein, tradition is worth listening to.

the grandeur of a certain movement, the harmony of a certain pattern, and the opportunity they gave for breadth of colour and illumination.¹ Nevertheless, the Dutchman and the Italian combined two quite different propensities with their general aim. Rembrandt, consciously or not, worked as many details as he could into his pattern, while Titian gave as few as possible. In the Dutchman's portrait the silhouette is full of accident, like a coast on a map, while the Venetian's lies about the figure in a few simple curves. Within the bounding line, the planes are numerous and elaborately distinguished with Rembrandt, few and broadly fused with Titian. Titian reduces the costume to one magnificent sleeve; Rembrandt dwells upon all its accidents of form and texture. It is the Germanic spirit on the one hand, transfigured by that aesthetic emotion which appears to come with the proximity of the sea; and, on the other, the Latin gift for generalization and that eye for the ideal without which it is impossible to generalize. The Dutchmen were not restrained, like Velazquez and his modern disciples, from driving colour to its highest power, by any respect for the sobriety of the actual. They disregarded values and used colour for its own sake often enough. They failed to rival the glow of Titian and Giorgione because idealism was not among their virtues.

¹ This design has an interesting pedigree. It passed from Titian—or Giorgione, if we lean towards Mr. Herbert Cook's hypothesis—to Sebastiano del Piombo, who used it for the Sciarra-Colonna "Violonista" (now in Baron Alphonse de Rothschild's collection), and from Sebastiano to Rembrandt, possibly through one of the many painters who afforded links between Rome and Amsterdam at the end of the sixteenth century; or it may have come direct from Venice.

CHAPTER III

The Making of the Peel Collection

BEFORE the acquisition of the Peel collection the National Gallery was curiously poor in examples of the Dutch school of the seventeenth century. It only contained fifty altogether. They included four Jakob Ruisdaels, two Cuijps, a De Hooghe, a Hobbema, three Van der Neers, three good specimens of Nicholas Maes, and, above all, no less than thirteen Rembrandts. The policy followed seems to have been one of assuming that the English National Gallery would be sure, in time, to reflect the richness of our private collections without any special effort on the part of the purchasing authority. The first director, Sir Charles Eastlake, spent his travelling allowance in Italy and Southern Europe, concentrating his energies on laying the foundation for a fine gathering of pictures from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It was well he did so, for delay in that matter would have left a gallery poor in Italian art face to face with the present law, and impotent to fulfil an important part of its mission. Even in 1871 it was asserted by many that the buying of the Peel pictures was a mistake, as the gallery would be sure to acquire all the Dutch pictures it wanted by gift and bequest. Fortunately, these objections were not listened to. As a matter of fact, the Dutch side of the collection has never been greatly favoured by donors and testators, and without these fifty-five pictures it would still be but poorly furnished. Between 1824 and 1871 only seven really fine Dutch pictures found their way into the collection *gratis*, while in the thirty-three years which have elapsed since the latter date only one has been so acquired, namely, Terborch's "Peace of Münster." The advent of this picture was dramatic. In 1868 it was sold, at the Demidoff sale in Paris, to the fourth Marquess of Hertford for nearly £7,000, the Director of the National Gallery being, very fortunately as it turned out, among the

disappointed bidders. Lord Hertford died in 1870, leaving his pictures, as every one knows, to his natural brother, afterwards Sir Richard Wallace. Some months later Sir William Boxall was sitting in his room in Trafalgar Square when he was informed that "a gentleman" wished to see him. "He won't give his name, Sir William, but he has a case under his arm which looks like a picture." "Tell him to write; give him a form——" But by this time the unknown was in the room, and was already beginning to undo the straps which secured the case. "I have a picture here," he said, "which I want to present to the National Gallery." The director, filled with the idea that the intruder was one of the countless importunate people who wasted so much of his time, was nearly pushing him through the door, when the box opened and disclosed the "Peace of Münster." "I nearly fainted," said Boxall when he told the story, "at my escape." Terborch painted this picture for his own pleasure; at least, he did not sell it, and it was still the property of his descendants in the middle of the eighteenth century. From a certain Terborch, who was receiver of government rents at Deventer in 1721, it was bought by Mr. van Leyden, from whom it passed into the Talleyrand collection. It was hanging in the room when the Peace of 1814 was signed in Paris, in Talleyrand's house, now the *hotel* of Baron Alphonse de Rothschild. It afterwards belonged to the Duc de Berri, at whose sale, in 1837, it was bought by Prince A. Demidoff for his famous villa at San Donato. In consequence of a badly worded paragraph in Buchanan's *Memoirs of Painting* it has sometimes been asserted that the Duke of Wellington once owned the picture. The only ground for this statement is that a fine impression of Suyderhoef's plate from it is at Apsley House.

Revenons à nos moutons! The Wynn Ellis bequest—such part of it as was accepted by the National Gallery—was useful in filling out the representation of the Dutch School, but no picture of first-rate excellence was included in it. Metsu's "Drowsy Landlady" is a good example of a first-rate master; W. v. de Velde's "Calm, with vessels saluting," a first-rate example of a good master; the large Ruisdael is too black and opaque; while the finest of the Van de Capelles fails to live up to its own sky. I think, therefore, that I am justified in saying that if the National Gallery had trusted to testators and donors, it

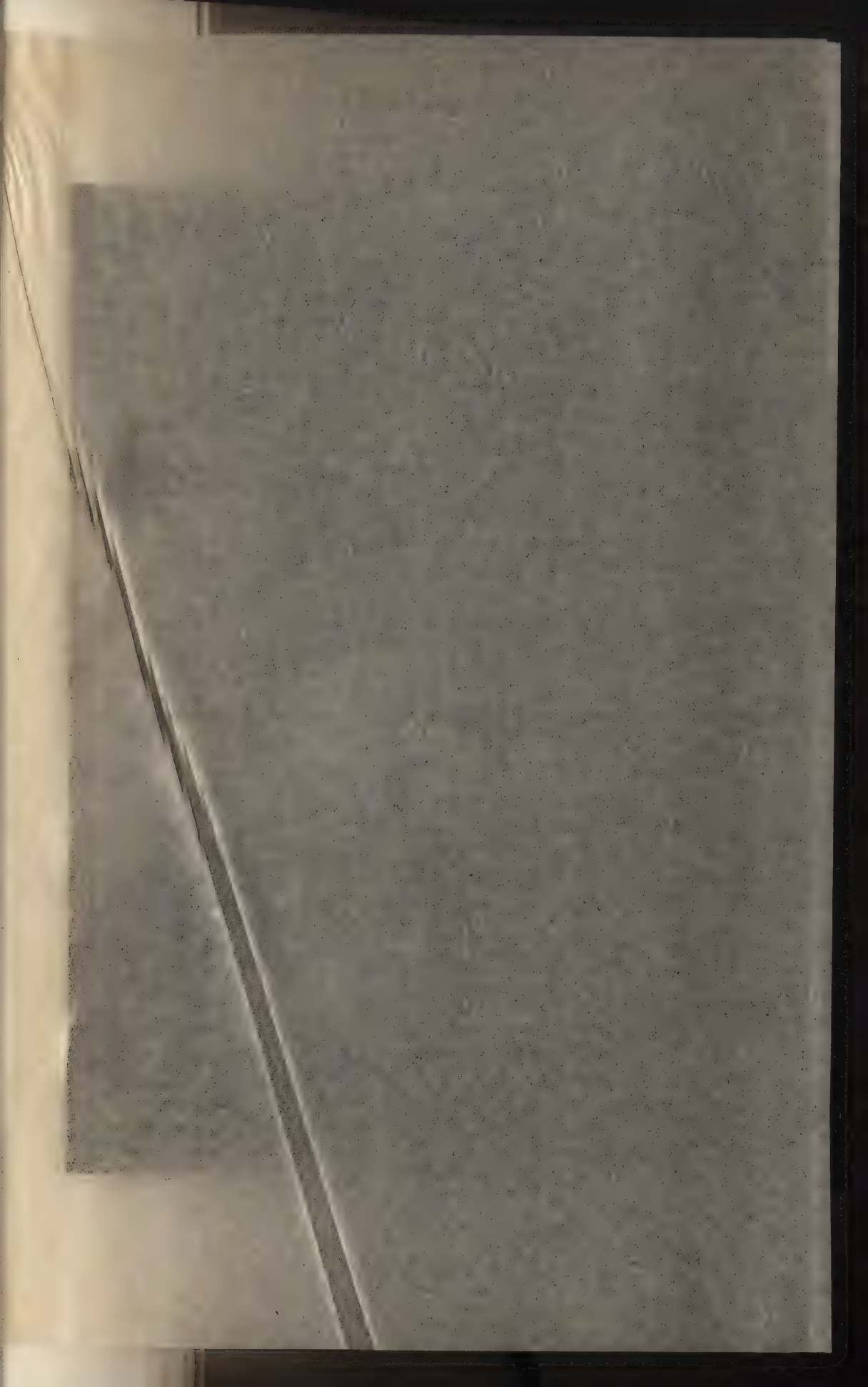
would still be putting Rembrandt forward as its one and only Dutchman with a proper certificate.

The Peel collection was offered to the Government in the early months of 1871. It had been gradually formed by the second baronet during the years which intervened between his Irish secretaryship (1818) and his death. He had gone to work with great judgment. A man of taste, he was in no sense a connoisseur. He had, however, the next best thing to knowledge—the desire to make use of it and the *flair* for where it lay. He employed various people in searching out good pictures and in negotiating their purchase. Wilkie was one of Peel's advisers. It was through him that the two Drayton Van Dycks, sold in 1901 at Fisher and Robinson's, were acquired. In a letter to Andrew Wilson, another of Sir Robert's agents, Wilkie writes: "He (Peel) said he was willing to give a good price, if a fine picture; and if it were not, he would not have it at any price."¹ He was there referring to a portrait of Philip III of Spain, by Van Dyck, reported to be in the Durazzo Palace at Genoa; but in all his purchases Sir Robert went on this principle. Occasionally an inferior picture found its way into his collection, but such things were got rid of at the first opportunity. Sir Robert's chief agents in buying Dutch pictures were two well known dealers, C. J. Nieuwenhuys and John Smith, the author of the famous *Catalogue Raisonné*. He also bought occasionally from Buchanan and others.

Of these men Nieuwenhuys was the cleverest. He lived, or at least preserved his activity, too long for his fame. When the collection he left behind him was put up at Christie's, it was seen to be over-cleaned and shining with varnish until you could see yourself in the pictures, to the damage of its owner's reputation as a man of taste. In his younger days, however, Nieuwenhuys was a good and courageous judge, seeing merit in unpopular things, and demerit in not a few of those which were on the crest of the wave of fashion. His book,² published

¹ *Life of Sir David Wilkie*, by Allan Cunningham, vol. iii. pp. 272.

² *A Review of the Lives and Works of Some of the most Eminent Painters, with Remarks on the Opinions and Statements of Former Writers*; London, 1834. The book contains many independent verdicts which time has confirmed, as well as much very outspoken criticism of his quondam associate, John Smith, and other rival connoisseurs.



would still be putting Rembrandts forward as its one and only Dutch artist with a proper certificate.

The Ford collection was offered to the Government in the early months of 1871. It had been gradually formed by the second baronet during the years which intervened between his first appointment (1810) and his death. He had gone to work with great judgment. A man of taste, he was in no sense a connoisseur. He had, however, the next best thing to knowledge, the desire to make use of it and to find for where it lay. He explored various people in searching out good pictures and in negotiating their purchase. While was one of Ford's advisers. It was through him that the two Durston Van Dycks, sold in 1921 at Fisher and Robinson's, were acquired. In a letter to Andrew Wilson, another of Sir Robert's agents, Wilkie writes: "He (Ford) said he was willing to give a good price, if a fine picture; and if it were not, he would not buy it at any price."¹ He was there referring to a portrait of Philip III of Spain, by Van Dyck, reported to be in the Durston Palace at Ghent, but in all his purchases Sir Robert went on this principle. Occasionally an inferior picture found its way into his collection, but such things were got rid of at the first opportunity. Sir Robert's chief agents in buying Dutch pictures were two well known dealers, C. J. Neumeuborg and John Smith, the author of the famous *Catalogue Raisonné*. He also bought occasionally from Buchanan and others.

Of these men Neumeuborg was the cleverest. He lived, or at least preserved his activity, too long for his fame. When the collection he left behind him was put up at Christie's, it was seen to be over-stained and shining with varnish and you could see yourself, in the pictures, to the damage of its owner's reputation as a man of taste. In his younger days, however, Neumeuborg was a good and courageous judge, seeing merit in unpopular things, and daunted in not a few of those which were on the crest of the wave of fashion. His book,² published

¹ *Life of Sir David Wilkie*, by John Cunningham, vol. II, pp. 172.

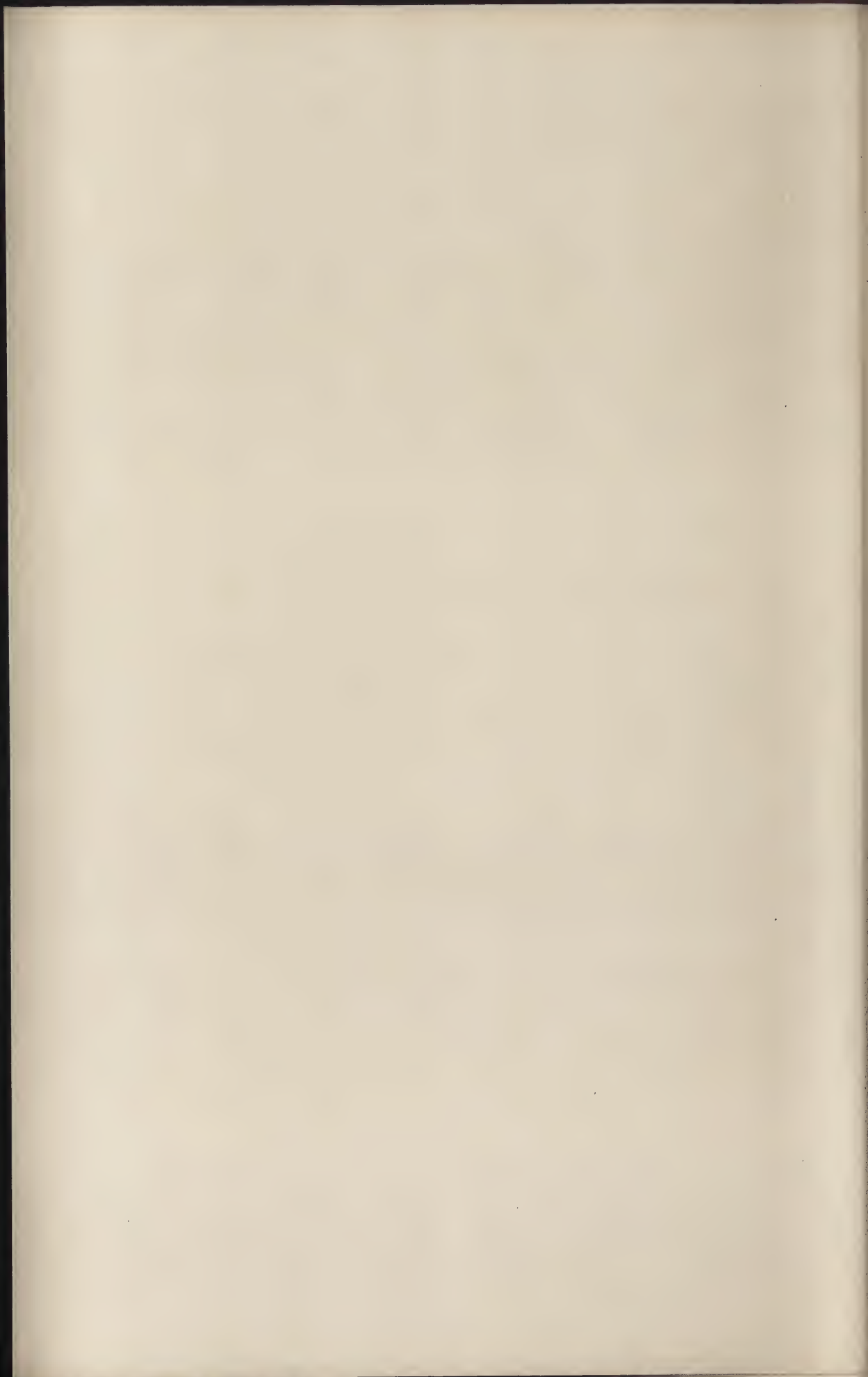
² *A Review of the Lives and Works of some of the most Eminent Painters, with Remarks on the Opinions and Arguments of some Writers*, London, 1794. The book contains many independent notices which have been confirmed, as well as much that is completely confirmed by his quotations, especially John Smith, and other great connoisseurs.



Roberts, p. 118.

Grandmont, p. 118.

Chapeau de Poil.



as long ago as 1834, is still worth reading. Its style is that of an auctioneer's catalogue, but its judgments are generally sound enough, and help to show that people like Van der Werff enjoyed their whilom *vogue* in spite of the best opinions. He understood the genius of Frans Hals. At page 129 he describes a pair of portraits by Hals, and prices the better of the pair at £22. These same two portraits were bought by Baron Alphonse de Rothschild some twenty years ago for many thousands. The lady is still in his collection, but divorced from her husband, who now hangs in the Antwerp Museum. Nieuwenhuys says of Hals :—"They (the pictures) are not at the present time duly appreciated, for Hals, notwithstanding his defects, was an excellent painter, and, on examining his productions with attention, we shall discern in him the mind of a genius, and the handling of a master, whose choice paintings deserve a better fate, and are worthy of a place in the finest collections." It is now difficult to say exactly which pictures entered the Peel collection immediately from Nieuwenhuys ; but we know the Hobbema "Brederode Castle," the Van der Heijde "Cologne," the Gonzales Coques, the fine "Calm" of Van de Velde, from the Duchesse de Berri's collection, and the "Chapeau de Paille" of Rubens, all passed directly from the ownership of the Anglo-Belgian dealer to that of the English statesman. Nieuwenhuys, however, was not sole owner of the "Chapeau de Paille." It was knocked down to him at the sale of M. Stiers d'Aertselaar, at Antwerp, in 1822, for 35,970 florins, which, with the auction duty, comes to about £3,000 ; but R. Foster and John Smith had each equal shares in the purchase. Sir Robert Peel bought the picture from Smith, after its public exhibition in Bond Street had earned an extra thousand pounds for its owners. I am told by Smith's descendants that the quarrel which afterwards broke out between him and Nieuwenhuys had to do with this purchase.

Smith was another of Sir Robert's agents. Besides the Rubens, the "Poulterer's Shop" of Gerard Dou ; the "Watermills," of Hobbema ; the "Village Scene," of Isaak van Ostade ; a fine Wouwerman and a second-rate Jakob Ruisdael, came directly from him to Whitehall Gardens. During the latter years of Smith's life, as I have already hinted, his relations with Nieuwenhuys were strained. Sir Robert had dealings with them both down to the end, but, in

spite of every assistance from Mr. Reginald Smith, I have found it impossible to trace all of these. Nieuwenhuys belonged to an irritable race, and had no slight sense of his own importance. Some of the notes to his volume are bitter indeed, his ire being more especially roused by what he thought the uncalled for estimates of value, given in the *Catalogue Raisonné*, of pictures with which he, Nieuwenhuys, had been concerned. "He (Smith) ought not to lead others astray with observations founded on his own imagination," "I have too often seen the pitiful attempts of Mr. Smith to misconstrue facts," are among his digs at his rival. Nieuwenhuys was fond of sprinkling censure about. It was pardonable enough to fall foul of Pilkington for translating *kraambezoek* (visit to a woman in child-bed) as "A Mercer's Shop," or to be severe on Buchanan for some of the very ignorant pronouncements contained in his *Memoirs of Painting*. But there is no mistaking the animus which disfigures not a few of the *Remarks on the Opinions and Statements of Former Writers*. The copy in my possession was formerly the property of Mr. Wells, of Redleaf, who has left more than one contradiction on the margins, to show that, even in 1835, he was sometimes in advance of the author's knowledge.

Here I may print two letters from Peel to Smith for the sake of the light they cast on the way in which his collecting was done :—

LULWORTH CASTLE,

Private.

October 7, 1823.

MR. SMITH,—

I shall be much obliged to you to bid for two or three of the pictures at Fonthill for me; and if you should succeed in purchasing them, I do not wish it to be known that they are bought for me. It may, however, be necessary perhaps to let Mr. Phillips¹ know. I should like to have the Frans Mieris (Lot 200), the Lady feeding a parrot. You may bid two hundred and fifty guineas for this. I am anxious to have the Gerard Dow (Lot 245). You may bid as far as thirteen hundred pounds for this picture, which is quite as much as it is worth. Bid three hundred guineas for the Egton van der Neer (Lot 280), or three

¹ The auctioneer.

hundred and fifty pounds, provided you do not purchase the Gerard Dow. You may bid for one of the small Teniers (Lot 293), "The Skittle Players," whatever you think the real value of the picture.¹

Yours etc.,

ROB. PEEL.

If a few pounds more than the sums I have mentioned would purchase any of the pictures, to that extent you may exceed those sums. I have sent a copy of this to Fonthill.

The second letter is in some ways more significant than the first. It contains an order to the now almost forgotten Dutch painter of marines, Johannes Christianus Schotel, to paint a pair of seascapes; and arranges for their composition with as much forethought as an Italian patron of the fifteenth century would have shown in the case of an altar-piece.

WHITEHALL,

May 2 (or 4), 1827.

MR. SMITH,—

I shall be obliged to you to inform Mr. Schotel that I am extremely pleased with the picture which he has painted for me—and that I shall place it in my gallery with my Van de Veldes, to which I think it is in no way inferior. I did not think that the modern school could have produced so exquisite a specimen.

I must entreat Mr. Schotel to paint for me two other pictures.

One a small one, a companion to the one he has already painted for me. I think it should be a calm. The dimensions are as follows (*these he forgets to insert*).

The other picture I should wish to have painted by him is as a companion to my large Backhuysen. The size of the Backhuysen is as follows (*measurements again forgotten!*).

I wish each picture to be a light picture as to colour. The larger one may be a light breeze.

I say nothing as to the price. I wish them to be most carefully finished and to be the chef-dœuvres (*sic*) of Mr. Schotel.

¹ The Mieris and the Dou were acquired, but not the Egton van der Neer or the Teniers.

I should wish neither one nor the other to be crowded with vessels. The small one—the “Calm”—may have the shore introduced into it, with figures on the shore—piles, etc., etc.

In the larger one I should wish to have one large vessel at least, or perhaps two, in the foreground—with the interior of the vessel visible. By vessel, I do not mean a ship of war, but a chaloupe or large fishing-boat.

Yours etc.,

ROBERT PEEL.

From these letters, which have been most kindly placed at my disposal by Mr. Reginald Smith, we may fairly come to two conclusions. In the first place they prove that Sir Robert Peel was not a fine judge of art. He may have been a connoisseur in that narrower sense which confines the meaning of the word to familiarity with works of art and with the opinions of the moment upon them. But his knowledge of art and sympathies with the artist cannot have been profound. Otherwise he could neither have spoken so warmly of Schotel, nor have put such restrictions on his freedom. On the other hand, the two letters, taken together, go far to dispose of the idea that the man who wrote them was entirely guided by his advisers in making his collection. He was probably able to appreciate certain qualities—such as finish—for himself, while, for the rest, he put in force the knowledge of men and capacity to collect and weigh opinions, which stood him in such good stead as a statesman. In any case, he succeeded in becoming the possessor of a very remarkable gathering of pictures, including those at Drayton Manor as well as the collection at 4 Whitehall Gardens.¹

¹ This house has been recently rebuilt, and is now occupied by the crown agents for the Colonies. It bears a label asserting that here Sir Robert Peel, statesman, died on the 2nd July, 1850. The label might have been more explicit. It makes no allusion to the rebuilding. Many of the Drayton pictures were sold at Fisher & Robinson's in 1901, with the sanction of the court; others had been previously disposed of without such sanction.

CHAPTER IV

The Dutch Painters of Society

I HAVE already hinted a confession that the master of my own predilection is Gabriel Metsu, who appears to me the completest embodiment of the qualities which are distinctively Dutch. He was excelled in this or that direction by others. He could not paint light with de Hooghe or Vermeer, or movement with Jan Steen ; his sense of life was less vivid than Vermeer's, of refinement less complete than Terborch's. But putting all these qualities together, and supplementing them with the further test which lies in unity, he was equal to the best ; while in the fine and rare quality of an expressive but strictly controlled handling he was the master of them all. In their finest works both de Hooghe and Vermeer reach heights unknown to Metsu. When we turn from such pictures as the "Delft," the "Laitière," and the "Soldier and the Laughing Girl," or those interiors of de Hooghe in which the sun plays on marble floors, among red petticoats and the rafters of timbered roofs, to the finest Metsu, we are conscious of a fall in vitality, in imagination, in ambition. Art, they say, is nature seen through a temperament. Well, with Vermeer and de Hooghe the temperament seems absolutely transparent. The nature seen through it is as vivid and brilliant as the real thing ; the temperament works only to arrange and marshal, not to modify or depress. With Metsu it is not so. He does not venture to look the sun quite in the face. As he recreates nature for our pleasure, he watches her through a smoked glass, through a temperament which prepares for unity by control. But if he never rises to the heights touched now and then by the two great masters of Delft, he seldom sinks below his own level, so that of all the artists of Holland—never failing, of course, to exclude

Rembrandt—he is the most consistently himself. The exceptions to this last assertion are a few portraits, an allegorical piece or two, and some outdoor scenes on a larger scale than usual. One of these last used to be quoted in bygone handbooks as the painter's masterpiece: I mean the "Marché aux Herbes" in the Louvre. It is a dull performance; so is the "Admiral Tromp" in the same collection; still duller is the "Justice protecting the Widow and the Orphan," at the Hague. But nearly all the Dutch "little masters" failed when they tried to drop the "little." Vermeer and a very different man, Aert van der Neer, were the only two who preserved much of their charm when they worked on a larger scale than usual. But even Vermeer failed sometimes, for it is impossible to contend that his Czernin picture, or the Dresden "Bei der Kupplerin," or the "Christ in the house of Martha and Mary," which was in Bond Street a year or two ago, have the fascination of his smaller works. So it comes to this, that the comparatively unimportant Van der Neer alone contrived to expand and yet remain himself; for of his two large landscapes in the National Gallery, one, at least,¹ has all his qualities in complete perfection.

I know about seventy of Metsu's pictures. The best in their various ways are, I think, the following. I give them in what seems to me their approximate chronological order:—

"The Letter received" (Mr. Beit's collection).

"The Musicians" (Hague Museum).

"An Interior" (Miss Alice de Rothschild's collection).

"The Family of the Merchant Geelvink" (Berlin Museum).

"The Intruder" (Lord Northbrook's collection).

"The Music Lesson" (National Gallery).

"Old Woman selling Fish" (Wallace collection).

Five small domestic scenes in the collection of Lord Iveagh (2), in the Wallace collection (1), and in the Louvre (2).

"The Letter-writer Surprised" (Wallace collection; there was an old copy of this picture in the Hope collection).

"The Duet" (National Gallery; Peel collection).

"*Un militaire recevant une jeune dame*" (Louvre).

"*Le Billet doux*" (Arenberg Gallery, Brussels).

¹ No. 152, bequeathed by Lord Farnborough. It has figures by Albert Cuijp.

“The Letter Writer” (Beit collection).

“The Sick Child” (Steengracht collection, at the Hague).

In arranging these, I have gone upon the assumption that the tightly painted pictures, with highly fused, metallic surfaces, come first, and that, like nearly every one else—for the rule is not quite without exceptions—Metsu gradually loosened his hand as years brought him experience and knowledge. The rare dates on his pictures support this assumption, but we have to use it with caution, as Metsu’s occasional surrender to “influence” brings in a disturbing element. The Hague “Musicians,” for example, might in some ways almost be a Terborch. It is very positively and even unmistakably a Metsu, but the evidence of this, obvious to the eye as it is, cannot be so easily recited in words. So far as intention could do it, Metsu has here turned himself into Terborch. The models are Terborch’s models, placed almost as he would have placed them. The design, however, is happier than his. Everything runs spontaneously into the arabesque, with none of the accident and slightly clumsy introduction, of which, as a rule, we find some little symptom in the older man’s work; but still the composition is essentially Terborchian, and it is only when we turn to the brilliant colour, the handling, and the final texture of the surface, that Metsu’s authorship stands out clear and incontestable. The picture now at Waddesdon, which used to be in the Van Loon collection, is another fine example of these highly elaborated Metsus. So are the “Intruder,” in Lord Northbrook’s collection, and—apart from subject and conception—the “Family of the Merchant Geelvink” in the Berlin Museum.

But, after all, handling is the most fascinating of pictorial qualities, and those later Metsus in which the march of the brush can be seen and enjoyed, are more agreeable than these too closely woven productions. The last five examples on the above list are all masterpieces in this respect. The most consummate, perhaps, is the red picture in the Peel collection. This seems to be the last word of expressive handling, and the design is worthy of the execution. Mr. Beit’s “Letter Writer” is a simpler conception, to which the opposition of a dark figure to a light background gives extraordinary force. But its painting is scarcely so delicate or expressive as that of

the "Duet." The Wallace picture, in which a lady is surprised, presumably by her husband, in some clandestine use of pen and ink, would be equally fine but for an unusual failure of judgment—perhaps one should say an unlucky experiment—in the use of colour. Orange is not a happy tint for the chief one in a picture. Metsu does not strike a false note with it, but he holds the note down too long. There is too much orange. Much happier in colour is the Louvre "*Militaire recevant une Jeune Dame*." Here his veiled art is again at its finest. The composition is perfect, and yet we feel as if it were not composed at all. The colour is luminous and luxurious, the handling broad, fat, and absolutely assured. Broader and fatter still is the unusual, Vermeerish-looking "*Sick Child*" in the Steengracht collection, which shows Metsu in a frame of mind we scarcely encounter elsewhere.

Metsu's handling is to be seen at its best in the red Peel picture. Here we find surfaces modelled, textures and solidities indicated, in a broad, decisive, and yet subtle touch which can be compared to nothing more apt than the march of the sculptor's thumb over the clay. It is a virtue which has practically disappeared from the studios, and been replaced by a dry, systematic procedure which threatens to substitute science for art. The instinct which enabled Metsu to be such a delightful composer, to cover his surfaces with so profound a fitness, enabled him also to combine exactly the right degree of knowledge with passion in his manipulation of paint. His superiority to Terborch as a composer can be seen from two pictures which hang together in the National Gallery. They are both music lessons, more or less. The Terborch is one of his best works; the Metsu a fine example of his earlier time. I have included it in the above list, and both are reproduced in these pages. As designs, these two pictures are not "*in the same street*." The Metsu *is* a design. It makes a delightful pattern, filling the space agreeably whichever way we measure it—vertically, horizontally, or perpendicularly to its plane. These two people so occupy a room as to bring it into their lives and ours; at the same time, they afford us æsthetic pleasure by the turn of every limb, by every contour, by the pattern of the facets they offer to the light. The Terborch has no such subtle union of art and reality. The young lady with the guitar has been seen by herself, so has the music-master. So, above all, has the

superfluous gentleman in the background, whom Metsu would have left out altogether. The girl is exquisite, combining great refinement with the ineradicable homeliness of her race in a way that was quite beyond any other Dutch painter. The music master, too, with those plump, hot hands which so excited Fromentin's admiration, is a wonderful figure. But how about the third member of the *société*? He is so obviously unwanted, so badly fitted in, that he is only to be accounted for either by supposing the whole thing a portrait group rather than a freely conceived picture, or by allowing that Terborch's sense of design was imperfect. There is no reason why both explanations should not be true.

And yet the Peel Terborch is perhaps his masterpiece so far as his characteristic qualities are concerned. At least, I know no other in which delicacy of manipulation and completeness of presentment are carried quite so far. The music master's foreshortened hand is a miracle of imitation, much finer than the hand of the amorous soldier in the picture which used to hang in the *Salon Carré*. All the heads are fine, while anything more delicious, in their own particular way, than the girl's arms and hands it would be hard to imagine. The dog is as bad as the dog in Sir Joshua's "Nelly O'Brien." But the silk dress makes up for it. Terborch's hand gloried in that as much as it lost its way in the spaniel's wool. The fine picture now in Mr. Alfred de Rothschild's collection, and another in Buckingham Palace, are richer in tone and better composed, but neither those nor the great "Peace of Münster," display the qualities which distinguish Terborch from the rest of the Dutch School so fully as the panel here reproduced.

I confess that Terborch's portraits in small leave me cold; but the "Peace of Münster" is a great picture. Nothing in it looks like a sacrifice of veracity to art, and yet it is eminently artistic. Rembrandt could scarcely have made the arrangement of the light more effective, although he would have forced it. It is curious to pass from this picture to the "Adulteress before Christ," a few yards away, and to feel the suspicion creeping over us that Terborch kept Rembrandt before his mind's eye as a guide through his unaccustomed task. The "Lanzas" of Velazquez may be the greatest historical

picture in the world, but this Terborch is history. The event happened thus, in this room, with all these people, disposed much as the painter, who was there, has arranged them on his panel. Among these sixty heads, several may be recognized as familiar in other portraits of the time, besides the delegates whose identities are known. The Abbe Scaglia, for instance, who was so often painted by Van Dyck, appears in profile on our right. A very young man, near the centre, has a familiar face, and so with two or three more.¹

The other painters of Terborch and Metsu subjects may be dismissed in a very few words. Frans Mieris the eldest could draw fairly well, which his son William could not. The father's best work is probably Mr. Steinkopf's "Amorous Cavalier," which is at least dramatic and well composed. Willem, the son, and Frans, the grandson, to say nothing of Jan, "practised what they called painting,"² when they ought to have been making boots—probably bad boots! Netscher has nothing particular to say to any one who cares for art, while Schalcken's glassy polish is, as a rule, highly disagreeable. Now and then, however, he paints a picture so well arranged that we almost forgive his superhuman patience. There is nothing of his, however, in the Peel collection. Neither does it include a Slingelandt, who sometimes painted 'society.' On the other hand, it includes one of those rare pictures by Jan Steen, which seem to have been painted in emulation of Metsu and Terborch.

If we judged him solely by his finest works, we should have to put Jan Steen at the very head of the Dutch school—again excepting Rembrandt.³ In his best pictures we find a combination of qualities that no other master can approach. His dramatic gifts, his sense of movement, character, and even of beauty, are unrivalled. He is a good colourist, a fine draughtsman, a magnificent handler, and he can design a picture.

¹ The city of Münster owns two pictures signed by Terborch which deal with the same event. One is a view of Münster, with the arrival of the Dutch envoy, Adriaen Pauw van Hemstede, for the congress. The figures only are by Terborch. The other is a first idea for the National Gallery panel. It contains fewer figures than our picture, but includes the recumbent statue of the Archbishop of Cambrai, one of the Spanish envoys, who died during the deliberations.

² The phrase is Sir Frederic Burton's.

³ It may be well to say, once for all, that all my superlatives are used with this reservation.

Unhappily, it is only at rare moments that he puts all these gifts into action. He has left a large number of pictures, but only a small percentage, one in ten perhaps, show him at his best, or anywhere near it. The great majority are hasty, almost perfunctory, productions in which some unhappy dislocation goes far to destroy our pleasure. Terborch is apt to set his characters in a room too small to hold them. Steen does the reverse, and surrounds his mannikins with spaces in which they are lost. His pictures have consequently no focus. There is no point of distance at which they can be taken in and enjoyed as a whole. Of this, the famous "Human Life," at the Hague, is a striking example. There the action takes place in a room as large as a railway station. The little figures are spotted over the floor until the conviction is brought home to us that the painter's state of mind as he worked was that of Sterne when he wrote *Tristram Shandy*. Unity—the unity of pictorial art—was forgotten, or only provided for by the ominous purple curtain which broods over the front of the scene, ready to slip down and blot out the humanity behind. You may say that here want of unity was inherent in his subject: if so, it was a bad subject for a picture. But I fear that Jan did not care for unity; that he did not understand its charm as Rembrandt, and Metsu, and Vermeer understood it. His compositions are seldom focussed. To this, however, the Peel picture is an exception. In general aspect it is quite unusual, and seems to have been painted under some impulse of rivalry with Metsu or Terborch. A small picture in the Six collection at Amsterdam, and another in the Hermitage at Petersburg, show the same desire for an elaborate finish and the same over-careful arrangement. In seeking after unaccustomed charms he let go of a more characteristic virtue, for these three pictures are without his expressive and masterly handling.

Steen is one of those painters who provoke comparisons. He has been compared to Hogarth, to Molière, to Morland, to Raphael, and all the comparisons seem just. If we may venture on such a deduction from pictures, he was probably the most gifted, mentally, of all the Dutch painters. In his conceptions we find evidence of all sorts of sympathies and understandings. He laughs with and at human nature, sitting often on the heights himself and looking sardonically down. He is often as coarse as Rabelais, but can be as delicate and subtle as Mr.

Henry James. His execution is masterly, his touch brilliant or broad as occasion requires, his sense of movement complete and profound. If nature had endowed him with concentration and more ambition, he would have contested the crown of Dutch painting with Rembrandt himself.

He has still to be studied abroad. Our museums and private galleries are not as rich in his better works as they might be. His own portrait, in Lord Northbrook's collection, is famous. The Duke of Wellington is rich in his pictures. Mr. Heseltine has a remarkable female portrait; Lord Dartrey, one of the best of his large pictures; Mrs. Joseph a wonderful little panel from the Vollenhoven collection, in which both his executive genius and his humour are at their best. The finest, perhaps, of his intensely dramatic biblical pictures was acquired about ten years ago by the little visited museum of Cologne. It represents the betrayal of Samson to the Philistines, by Delilah. In vital energy, combined with nearly all pictorial virtues—drawing, colour, handling—it scarcely has its equal elsewhere in the Dutch School.

Pieter de Hooghe and Jan Vermeer differ from the men we have been discussing in one radical particular. Metsu, Terborch and Jan Steen were essentially observers who instinctively concealed the art which gives such value to their pictures. They concealed it by making it consummate, by making it so intensely appropriate that it looks inevitable, that it seems to be an unavoidable consequence of their method of vision. With de Hooghe and Vermeer it was not so. They were so frankly interested in the chief pictorial motive of each of their works, that they made sacrifices and allowed it to become obvious and controlling, just as Albert Cuijp does in a landscape. Vermeer went boldly to his end, shrinking from no expedient to get the effect he wanted. In the "Soldier and the Laughing Girl," for instance, he puts the spectator's eye close to the soldier's back, forcing the perspective and enabling the huge dark circle of the man's hat to be opposed in a startling way to the sunny expanse beyond. In nearly all Vermeer's better works we find a trick, if I may call it so, of some kind, some expedient by which the ruling idea is raised to its highest power. It is the same with de Hooghe. His range, however, is far narrower



A LADY FEEDING A PARROT. *By F. Van Mieris. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstaengl.*



BLOWING BUBBLES. *By G. Netscher. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstaengl.*





THE MUSIC MASTER. *By Jan Steen. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstaengl.*





INTERIOR OF A DUTCH HOUSE. *By Pieter de Hooghe. From a Photograph by Morelli.*

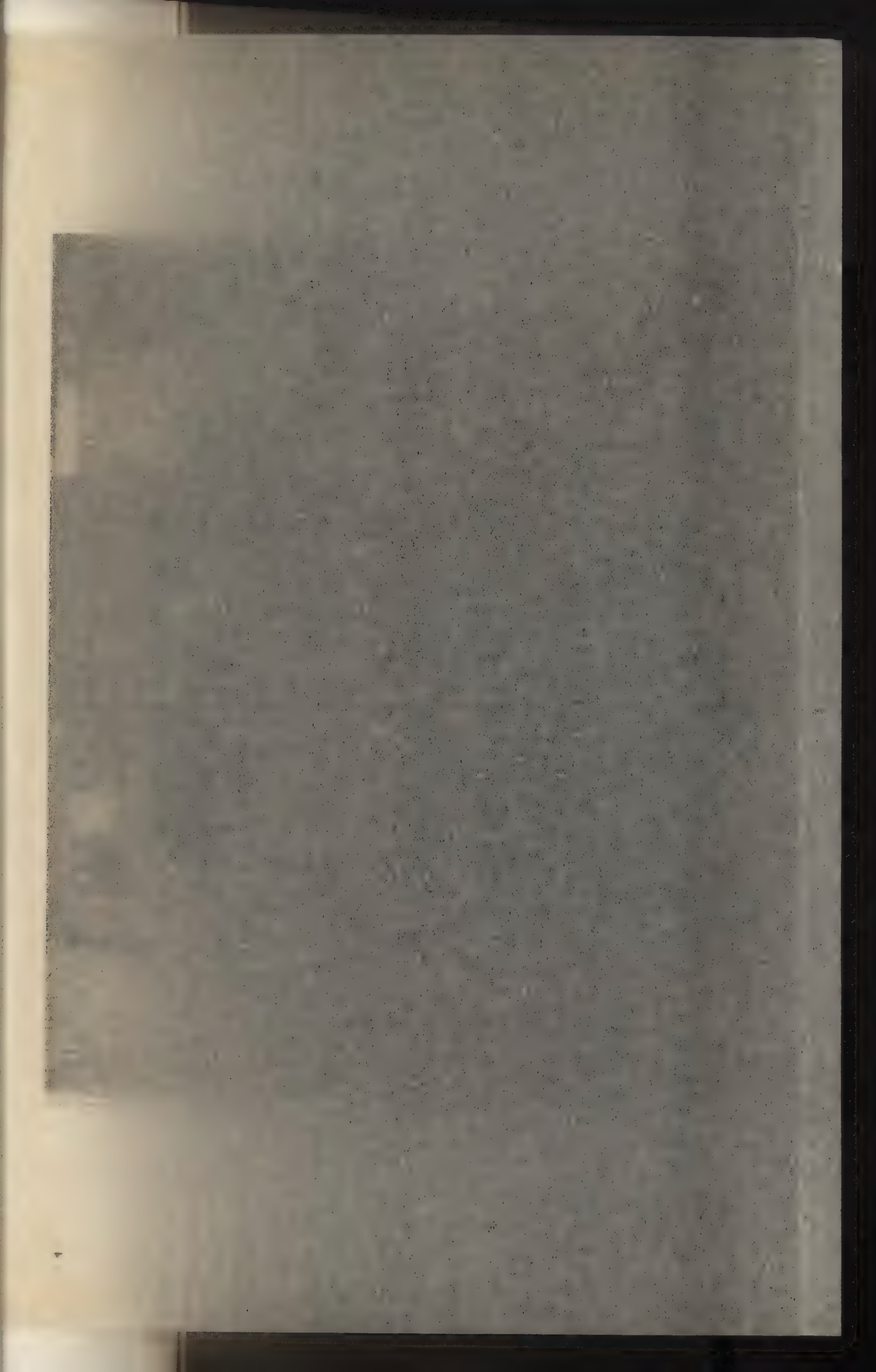


than Vermeer's. His interest is always absorbed by the one problem, that of capturing and bottling the sunlight. From his earliest pictures to his latest, his real ambition never varies. In youth he likes the broadest daylight, whereas with advancing years he prefers merely to suggest the outside sun, as it creeps down tiled passages, through red curtains and half-open shutters. He begins by getting his effects in the simplest way, in the way of Rubens. He keeps his shadows transparent and his lights solid, lightly glazing the latter as a finish. "White is poison in a shadow," said Rubens, and de Hooghe acts on the precept. In his middle period he develops and complicates the process enormously—building up his pictures by a marvellous succession of glazings, scumblings, and re-glazings. In his last and least satisfactory manner he makes the unhappy discovery that a dark ground will afford a short cut, and enable him to get his results more rapidly and surely. He did not understand that with the passage of time the dark would come through and falsify his conclusions.

The first mutterings of de Hooghe's genius are to be studied in few public galleries. Dr. Hofstede de Groot showed me a picture which is probably the earliest yet discovered. It is of no great merit, and has, moreover, suffered a good deal; but it helps to prove that such pictures as the "Interior" at Petersburg, the "Players at Tric Trac" in the National Gallery of Ireland, and the "Interior of a Stable" in Mr. Fleischmann's collection, are the earliest things in which the master's genius began to show itself. For these four pictures must have been painted within a year or two of each other. They all contain the same models, and, in execution, differ only in the growing certainty with which effects are won. The method is that described above as marking his first period. The shadows are all quite transparent, veiled only, when they are veiled, by the superposition of transparent on transparent colour. The lights are solid and brilliant, and have been painted originally in a higher key than necessary, to leave room for a finishing glaze, which brings them down to their right value and leaves the whole picture glowing like a stained glass window.

The extreme rarity of examples belonging to this period of de Hooghe shows that it was soon over, and that but little preparation was required before he blossomed into the manner which distinguishes his greatest

works. This manner is richly illustrated in all three of the National Gallery examples. It is most clearly to be followed, however, in the "Interior" of the Peel collection, which I propose to analyse. Scores of times have I seen this picture being attacked by clever copyists, who tried to get its colour straight away, as if they had a David or a Knaus before them. Nothing, of course, would have enabled them to reproduce de Hooghe; but if they had taken the trouble to examine his texture before they began, they might have avoided the worst feature of their libels. Practically the whole colour, as we see it, is the result of elaborately calculated alternations of opaque or semi-opaque and transparent tints. Many of the shadowed parts are painted in transparent pigment over an orange ground. In some parts this is allowed to show strongly, in others we only divine its existence by its effect on the colour above it. The same orange is used as a ground in many of the high lights. The sleeve of the man seated in the foreground, for instance, is painted over it in semi-opaque colour, the device resulting in a beautiful opalescence very difficult to obtain by solid painting. A similar process is to be traced in nearly every part of the panel. The brilliant skirt of the woman on our left is modelled by glazing over vermilion. The other woman—a penitente—is painted so thinly that the tiles now show through her petticoat as if she were a ghost. Another ghost, imperfectly laid, is that of a burly man, in cloak and steeple hat, who once stood between us and the chimney-piece. The table under the window, another afterthought, introduced to add to the sense of depth, is so thin and transparent that we might almost call it the ghost of a table. Probably de Hooghe did not understand how a single coat of oil paint loses its opacity with time, especially when free from white; and so some of his happiest notes have lost their voice. The right hand of the seated man, for instance, once reflected the sunlight from its upper surface, and the same light, warmed by the crimson feather, from its palm. The paint is now so thin that the man's ruffle shows strongly through, and the hand has joined the other ghosts. All this process is made use of to get as near as possible to illusion in the painting of sunlight. De Hooghe was not content, like Rubens, to confine transparency to his shadows, and to have his high lights solid, reflexive, and cool. His whole surface had to be glowing with inner



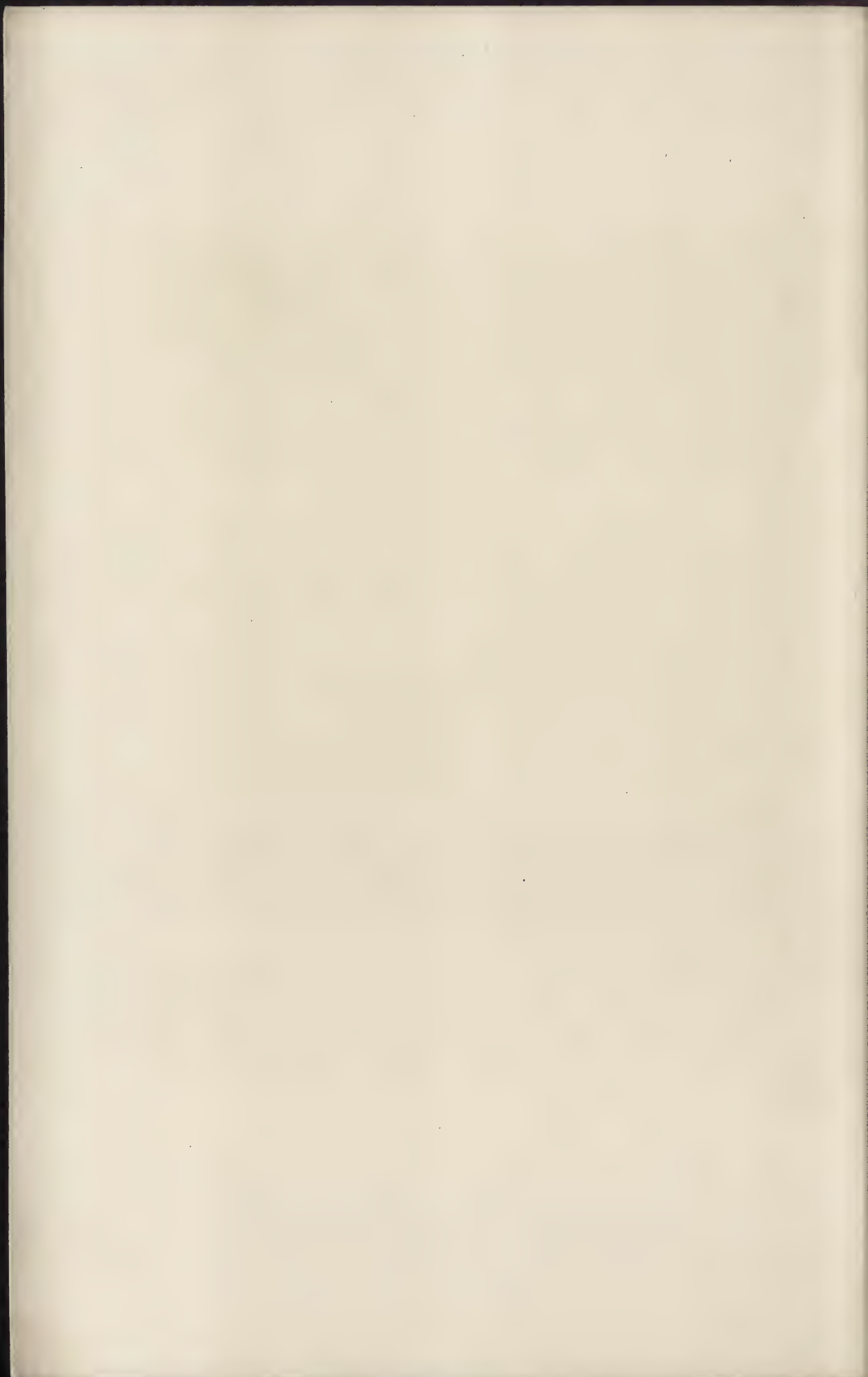
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P. De Kooch, photo

The Autotype Company, N.Y.

The Court of a House



lights, like a gem, so that the difference between deep shadow, light breaking through a veil—the sun shining through a red curtain, for instance—and light reflected from surfaces fully exposed to it, is one not of kind, but of degree. I know no other de Hooghe in which all this is so easy to follow as in the Peel “Interior,” but the same method is used, more or less, in all the works of this middle period. Number 794 in the National Gallery, a somewhat earlier picture, probably—it is dated 1665—is much more solid in execution, but the system is there. So, too, in the very similar picture in the Vienna Academy (in which Burger thought he recognized the hand of his “Sphinx,” Jan Vermeer), and in the ever-to-be-regretted picture which left the Hope collection for America. I might add to this list the two pictures in Buckingham Palace; the “Interior,” belonging to Lord Bute; various pictures at Amsterdam, especially the little one of a Dutch mother attending to her child’s hair, the earlier of the two Wallace pictures, a picture now, or recently, in the possession of Messrs. Lawrie & Co.,¹ the two examples in the Louvre, and in fact everything he did during the fifteen or twenty years which formed his middle and greatest period.²

Speaking roughly, the characteristics of de Hooghe’s last and least satisfactory period are the greater size and elaboration of his pictures, and his use of a dark ground. So little is known of his career that it is only guessing if we suppose that the change was brought about by an increased demand for his work. The desertion of simple interiors, peopled by the comparatively humble, for luxurious rooms inhabited by ladies in rich costumes, certainly points to a rise in his *clientèle*, and to a

¹ This carried us into the same courtyard as that shown in the National Gallery, No. 784. It was the yard of the painter’s house at Delft. It occurs in many of his pictures, sometimes with the flight of steps and little harbour at the back, sometimes with the steeple of the Nieuwe Kerk rising above the wall. A corner of it is used in the Peel picture, No. 835, with a concocted and quite unstable piece of architecture foisted in on the left. It—the yard—appears in the picture of the Viennese Academy, which has more of the air of fidelity to fact than the others. Here the harbour and steps are on our right, the steeple, which marks the resting place of William the Silent, in the centre of the background.

² De Hooghe’s dates are not certainly known. He was born in 1630 and died in or after 1677; at least, that date is the latest which occurs on any known work of his. It appears on a picture in the Steengracht collection, which evidently belongs to his latest time. If we suppose that he lived till 1680, that only gives him some thirty years of activity altogether.

change from pictures painted to sell to those made on commission. This would also help to account for his adoption of a dark ground, for the one recommendation of that device is that it saves time. It was fatal to the greatest of de Hooghe's charms—his sincerity. The best of his late pictures have an alloy of affectation about them. He has found out a way of obtaining his effects easily, and his conceptions become, as it were, machine made. Light is opposed to dark in a mechanical way, and we find this sometimes carried so far that a canvas will be all shadow at one end and all light at the other. I know one picture which might be cut in half down the middle, and turned into a dark picture and a light one, each complete in itself. This would not matter much if the old determination to be true survived, and if the sunlight were still worshipped with the sincerity of 1655-1670. But it is not worshipped at all. It is looked upon as an easy road to effect, and many of the cleverest pictures so contrived leave us cold and unmoved. One of the best is in Apsley House; another is the Steengracht picture already alluded to; the Duke of Arenberg has one; another is in the Wallace collection; further good examples belong to Sir Frederick Cook, Mrs. Joseph, Mr. Crews and others.

CHAPTER V

The Dutch Painters of the People

It is curious that Dutch painting succeeds better, on the whole, with the upper classes than with the proletariat. The five names to which most of our attention has so far been given are the five greatest in Dutch art, after that of Rembrandt; and four at least of the quintette do best when they are dealing with the refinements of life. Terborch seldom strays into the lower *couches sociales*, Metsu deteriorates when he does so; the best pictures of Vermeer deal with the gentle classes; de Hooghe seldom cares to look far below them. Jan Steen alone is equally at home with all, doing best, perhaps, when he has contrived a mixture of gentility with unbridled nature. In most countries and at most periods the painting of manners loses its salt as it mounts in the social scale. It is easier to make a picture out of a cottage than a castle, or out of an old cart mare than a racehorse; for the same reason, the free manners of the farmhouse lend themselves with more facility to manipulation of the artist than the etiquettes of the château. But, in spite of this general truth, the Dutchmen contrived to preserve the natural superiority of the educated man or woman even in their pictures. There is nothing insipid in a Metsu or a Terborch, even when its *dramatis personæ* are in silk and satin. Human nature is breathing in it, and we miss little that we find in the best work of such men as Adriaen van Ostade or Teniers. Brouwer, no doubt, dives more deeply into character, providing a Flemish parallel to the best conceptions of Jan Steen. Putting him aside, it would be difficult to name a painter who adds anything essential to the life we see in the polite pictures of our last chapter.

This best of all painters of low life—I mean, of course, Brouwer—was born at Oudenarde in 1605 or 1606. But, if Flemish by birth,

he was Dutch by training. He worked under Hals at Haarlem and under some unidentified Hollander at Amsterdam. Between 1626, when he was about twenty, and 1631, when he settled in Antwerp, he seems to have been continuously in Holland, so that his art, if not his extraction, may fairly be credited to the Dutch. In his short life of about thirty-three years he seems to have painted some fifty or sixty pictures, eighteen of which are now in the Munich gallery. Very few of his better works are in the United Kingdom, and to know him thoroughly it is necessary to compare the pictures at Amsterdam, Munich, Dresden, the Hague (Steengracht collection), Petersburg and Madrid with two in London, one at Apsley House, the other in the Ionides collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Brouwer does not date his pictures, although he usually leaves his little monogram on them somewhere. We have therefore to determine his chronology entirely by our reading of the probabilities. Considering that his activity did not cover more than perhaps fifteen years, his productions show unusual variety. The changes through which they passed correspond roughly to those which mark the work of Adriaen van Ostade. The latter was a youth of eighteen, at Haarlem, while Brouwer was there working in the studio of Hals. The elder man clearly had a decisive influence on the younger. Two pictures in the Rijks-museum are examples of the first manner of Brouwer. They represent the Dutch boor in his glory, drinking, quarrelling, and generally misbehaving himself. They are soundly painted in over-red tones, and suffer from the common fault of young painters in being too crowded, restless, and vociferous. The hardness and exaggerated bustle of these early works was soon left behind, and we find them superseded by the simplicity in violence and the breadth of handling of the Munich "Card Players Quarrelling in an Inn," which is a masterpiece in its way. Compare a picture like this with the famous "Rixe" of Meissonier, in which the French artist attempts an identical subject, and you will see how much the more spontaneous and intelligent of the two the Dutch master was. Compared to those of Meissonier, the figures are quiet, and yet how they excel the others in energy, in sincerity, in the power with which they drive conviction into us who look on. Those two fellows in "La Rixe": they will stand so for a month, making mouths.

but never striking, their weight upheld, cantilever-wise, by the counterpoise of their judicious friends. Now, in the Brouwer, the only doubt you have is as to the efficiency of the jug! If that is solid and heavy enough, the cheat's skull will crack in half a second like an egg. All the movement is sincere, it is all directed to its ostensible aim in a natural way; and yet it makes a capital pattern. The handling is still a little heavy, and in parts the panel bears too much paint. These defects have passed away when we come to No. 888 in the same gallery, "Peasants at Cards." Here the painting is broader and more fluid, the colour warmer and more transparent, the technique generally more skilful and more nicely adapted to its end. Another step in advance carries Brouwer to such art as we see in the picture of the Ionides collection. His grip on character is still firmer; his avoidance of the least excess either in action, characterization, or manipulative dexterity, still more unerring. The picture looks as if it were painted for the subject and for the story to be told, and yet its art is consummate. There is no hint of effort, no superfluous touch, and nothing wanting. The technique is as broad, light, and free as that of water-colour, and the resulting surface as sound as enamel.

Brouwer's latest manner is shown in the picture at Apsley House and in the very similar one in the Steengracht collection. Bitten, perhaps, by recollections of Frans Hals, he deserts the solid preparations and broad glazes of his middle period for a method in which form is built up by frankly left strokes of the brush. It is all done with great dexterity; but somehow we feel it was not so natural to its doer as the quieter method it superseded. When we reach these two pictures, and the extraordinary "Smoker" of the La Cage collection, in the Louvre, we cannot help perceiving that we have left a Brouwer who had no rival for one who was a clever echo of Hals.

Brouwer's pictures are almost too good. The art in them is so consummate, from both the conceptive and executive points of view that it almost eludes recognition, so that we are left face to face with the vigorous but low-lived drama, and nearly shamed out of our admiration. It would require some hardihood to uphold a portrayer of pothouse brawls if his "portraits" were simply reproductions of the fact. We should have to follow the *Grand Monarque*, call them

maggots, and be done with them. In spite of their veracity, however, they are by no means merely true. If their subjects are so wanting in dignity that at the first blush it seems absurd to speak of them in the same breath as Titians, or Rembrandts, or Gainsboroughs, we must fall back on our principles, and remember that Brouwer clothes his coarse pages from the life of the people in exactly the same vivifying garment of art as that which has preserved the glory of those three men. The difference between Titian's "Magdalen" and that of Guido is entirely one of art. Put aside colour, handling, and the texture of the paint, and there is nothing to choose between them. It is upon those purely pictorial qualities that one has floated down through the centuries, while their absence has left the other to sink and be forgotten. The most readily accessible Brouwer in London is the fine one in the Ionides collection. It is a miracle of executive expression. Its methods have much in common with those of de Hooghe, as described in the last chapter. Very little of the pigment is opaque. Transparent and semi-transparent tones, used with a nice alternation, build up its luminous substance, and leave us at last before a panel in which nothing is scamped and nothing overdone, in which knowledge and feeling for what is required to at once express the author's personality and satisfy the spectator, amount to inspiration.

Considering the number of his pictures and a vogue which had lasted for more than two centuries and a half, it is strange that the career of David Teniers is still but obscurely known. He was born at Antwerp in 1610, and flourished, in every sense of the word, for eighty years. He was keeper of the Archduke Leopold William's pictures, bought himself a château at Perck, where he received the cream of the Flemish nobility and some of their Spanish masters, died at Brussels, and was buried at Perck, full of honour, in 1690. He married two wives successively, the first being a daughter of Velvet Brueghel. Those facts are known. He is also believed to have been the pupil of his father, David Teniers the Elder, and of Rubens. As to these two statements doubts are permissible. The whole question of the elder and younger Teniers has yet to be cleared up. Most of the pictures ascribed to the father are obviously by the son. They are in a style not to be distinguished from that of the son at his maturity, al-



THE ALCHEMIST. By A. Van Ostade. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstängl.





A VILLAGE SCENE. *By I. Van Ostade. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstaengl*



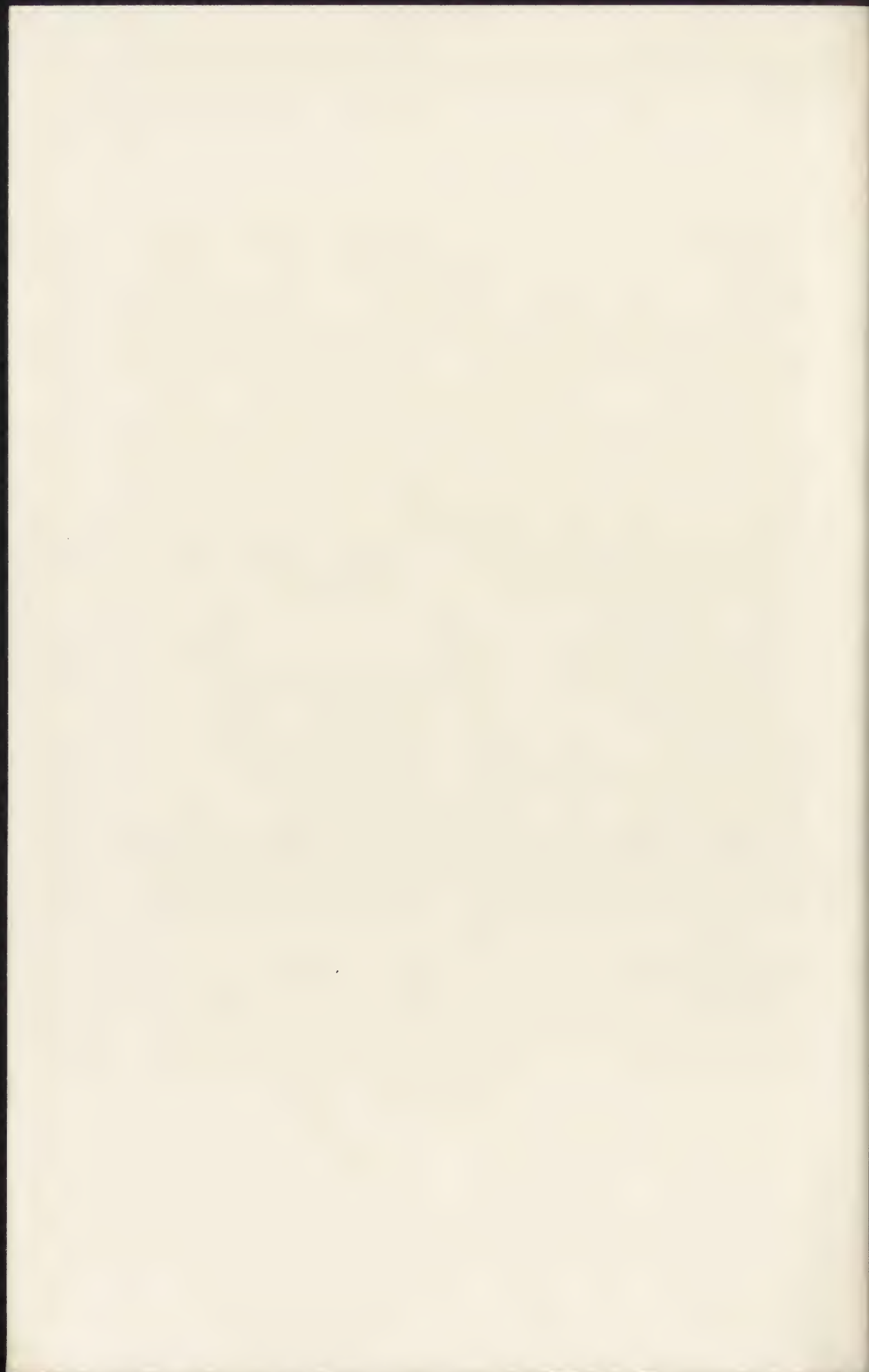


THE SURPRISE. By D. Teniers the younger. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstängl.





THE POULTERER'S SHOP. *By Gerard Dou. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstaengl.*



though this style had been preceded by one essentially different. If the younger Teniers had begun life as his father's pupil, we should have found signs of the affiliation in his first manner, rather than in his second. This question has often been discussed, but has never been entirely cleared up.¹ Judging from internal evidence, which is, after all, the safest ground, Teniers the younger painted most of the pictures ascribed to his father, and that not in his first, but in his second period, when he had settled down into his own permanently distinctive style. This style had been preceded by one obviously based on Brouwer; that is to say, it was like Brouwer in choice of subject, in method of execution, and in its idea of how a picture should look. As Brouwer was the only source, so far as we know, from which Teniers could have derived these qualities, I think "obviously" is not too strong an adverb. These early pictures are not very numerous. They are distinguished by a fat, fused touch, by rich colour, and by an absence—complete at first, only partial later—of that sparkling, staccato touch which afterwards became the painter's hall-mark. In the public collections of the United Kingdom, the only specimens I know are in the National Galleries of Scotland and Ireland, in the Glasgow Gallery, and in the Gallery at Dulwich. Ten years ago a very fine one was sold at Christie's, where it excited some scepticism by its lack of the "characteristic" handling of Teniers.

If I am not greatly mistaken, a piece of evidence exists which is decisive as to a close connexion between Teniers and Brouwer. In the Duke of Westminster's collection, at Grosvenor House, there is a landscape by Brouwer with figures by Teniers. It is ascribed to Rembrandt; but how could Teniers have painted figures in a Rembrandt? And yet the figures are certainly his. The subject is a gloomy landscape under a setting, or a rising, sun. The foreground is occupied by a pond, which fishermen are dragging. The execution of the landscape is entirely in Brouwer's later manner, and it would be difficult to ascribe it to any one else. It bears no real likeness to a Rembrandt.

Brouwer settled in Antwerp in 1631, when Teniers was just twenty-one. If we suppose that the latter had acquired the bare rudiments from his father, and succumbed to the semi-Dutchman's example as

¹ See Dr. Bode's *Studien der Geschichte der Holländischen Malerei* (Brunswick, 1883), p. 318, for a note on Teniers the elder.

soon as it was seen, we shall account for his early style. It is easy to account for his second. Brouwer died in 1638, and Teniers came under the influence of Rubens and his *entourage*. Of this we have plenty of evidence besides that of style. He collaborated with the collaborators of Rubens, and changed his methods to suit theirs, just as even Rubens himself did. The "Garden of Eden," at the Hague, to name but one instance, shows how far the great painter was ready to go to meet such an artist as Brueghel. Teniers now followed the precepts of Rubens implicitly. His system was to build up by solid lights on a ground of transparent shadow, keeping his touch as crisp and unbroken as possible. At his best time, which was probably not long after he first came under the new influence, he combined this excellent recipe with breadth of conception and a fine eye for what used to be called "keeping." In his later years his pictures were apt to be divisible into high, spotty lights, and hot though still transparent shadows. Intellectually Teniers had none of the serious gravity of the Dutchmen. He looked at his world in a superficial way, the Hollander's faculty for suggesting the presence of real men and women, with complex cares and responsibilities, within their roistering mannikins, was quite beyond him. His eyes only saw outsides, he was content with acts, and troubled neither about motives nor the depths of character.

The best picture by Teniers in the National Gallery is the "Players at Tric-trac," bequeathed by Lord Farnborough. In style it belongs to the early years of his middle period, while the memory of Brouwer, with his breadth of effect and interest in character, still persisted. The Peel specimens are not so good, the best, perhaps, being the one here reproduced, in which an old reprobate is making advances to a young woman. It is a shallow production; its one merit is the expressive dexterity of its handling.

No Dutchman equalled Brouwer in his own line, although Brouwer's art is entirely Dutch. Adriaen van Ostade, who came nearest, lagged a long way behind. In Ostade's best work, no doubt, we find a sense of movement and clumsy peasant vitality which is almost unrivalled. "A Peasant Dance," which used to belong to Mr. Foster of Clewer, was a remarkable instance of this. It had almost a cinematographic effect, so cleverly had the painter suggested the moment before and

the moment after the actual instant chosen. But Ostade is without the fine design, the tragic intensity, and the unequalled adaptation of means to ends, in execution, of Brouwer. Compared with the Fleming he had no sense of balance and unity. His pictures seldom focus. The relation between his figures and accessories and the space they occupy is seldom good. His best gift is sincerity. He does as well as he can, and hopes it will be found sufficient to provide him with bread and butter. He had some versatility. A picture at the Hague shows him as the painter of a group of portraits, men and women sitting stiffly in their own parlour, which charms by downright honesty and by good colour. The single Ostade in the National Gallery came with the Peel collection. It is not entirely characteristic. It looks as if it might have been painted when his pockets were emptier than usual, and he had to be content with one model. Its merit lies in its agreeable tone and in the skill with which the scanty light is carried about the long room in which the alchemist plays with his retorts at one end while his wife does her chores at the other. It is the fashion now to speak of Isaak Ostade as if he were a better artist than Adriaen. He had more courage, and sets out on a difficult task with a light-heartedness never shown by his brother, but his grip on nature was less firm and he was apt to become artificial. Some of his large compositions look as if they had been studied from scenes on the stage. His two pictures in the Peel collection are among his best works, especially the less famous of the pair, the frost scene. Of his larger compositions the two best I know belong to Mr. Alfred de Rothschild. Lower down in the same class comes Jan Miense Molenaer. He occasionally painted very well, and also deserves to be remembered as the husband of the mysterious Judith Leyster, whose best pictures equal the better ones of her husband. Molenaer, when he liked, was almost a first-rate *painter*. I do not know any very good example of his work in this country. The specimen in the National Gallery is only second rate; another of similar merit is in the Irish National Collection. The best picture by him I ever saw is in the possession of Geheimer Kommerzienrat St. Michel, at Mayence, where it is ascribed to Esaias Boursse, on the strength of a doctored signature. It is a large picture, comparatively, and represents three generations

of the middle-class family we see in so many of his compositions. They are merrily occupied in various ways, some of the figures being extraordinarily full of life and movement. The handling is worthy of Hals or Steen almost at their best, and little is wanted but more unity to make the picture a masterpiece. But Molenaer never digested his conceptions. He threw them on the canvas as they occurred to him, and so it is only in a few small and very simple designs that he touches the skirts of creation. In this matter the little picture in the Staedel Institute, of a woman at a spinet, is as good as anything he did. His wife, Judith Leyster, who first peeped over modern horizons some eight or ten years ago, combines the influence of Hals and Molenaer. The best things I have seen by her are the portrait in the Rijks-museum at Amsterdam, and a picture which used to be at Audley End, over which the lawsuit was fought which led to the rediscovery of her name and fame. She had plenty of manipulative ability, but, like nearly all women, was overshadowed by those artists of the other sex with whom she came in contact. Molenaer was a mistake as a husband for her, I mean from the artistic standpoint. She adopted his manner, and with it, apparently, his irresponsible way of regarding his art. Zorgh, who apparently modelled himself on Brouwer but passed most of his life at Rotterdam, and various painters whose works are not often seen outside their native Holland, belong to the same class. On these men and such others as Pape, Brekelenkam, De Bloot, etc., etc., it is not necessary to dwell. Good artists in their way, they are essentially followers, men who would have filled respectably any minor place in any civilization. If they had lived now they would have painted modest echoes of Israels, or Mauve, or James Maris; if they had flourished eighty years ago, they would have left us hard and painty *pasticci* on Adrien van Ostade or William van de Velde. A rather different man, a man, indeed, with an individuality of his own, was Cornelis Pietersz Bega. He was a pupil of Adriaen van Ostade, but his pictures bear but superficial traces of his master's influence. At bottom he was what we should call a stylist. His subjects did not differ greatly from those of Ostade, but his preoccupation was not with dramatic qualities, character and movement, but with line, with the fall of draperies, and the agreeable occupation of a surface. As a rule his pictures have

darkened so much that little pleasure is now to be had from them, but as designs they are often very good indeed, and his high finish seems more in place than that of many others. As might be guessed from his pictures, his studies and drawings are among the best of the Dutch school. The Bega in the National Gallery, a very good one, is dated 1663, the year before his death.

Better than any of these, as good, indeed, as any of the Dutchmen when he himself was at his best, was Nicolas Maes, the pupil of Rembrandt, who began in glory and ended in a chilly fog. Born at Dordrecht in 1632, he moved to Amsterdam and worked under Rembrandt during the years when the great man's art was at its richest and freest. He was attracted by Rembrandt's *chiaroscuro*, but not sufficiently to induce him to use it with the vigorous irresponsibility of his master. His early pictures show that he thought, as it were, in light and shadow, but that he shrank from losing his hold on the simple nature before him. Rembrandt was his own law. His *chiaroscuro* is a personal dialect, consistent with itself, but not hanging to the skirts of fact. He is quite ready to set a brilliantly lighted figure in a landscape all mystery and gloom, and to carry sunbeams about his canvas with the arbitrariness of the limelight man at the Adelphi. Maes had no nerve for that. He would use the sun, but required authority. His best work, perhaps, is the small panel in the National Gallery, called "The Dutch Housewife." It is a masterpiece of simplicity and concentration. The woman minds her business and the little girl looks on with absorbed attention, as if the future of the world depended on the scraping of that parsnip, as some one has said. The light is allowed to stream into the room from one small window, to fall upon the two figures and to die away quietly into the glooms beyond. Maes feels obliged to let you see where it comes from, and to control its action with the most literal regard for fact. Rembrandt would have dragooned it as he chose, and left the spectator to find the explanation, far-fetched as it might be. "The Dutch Housewife" was painted in 1655, when Maes was twenty-three. The whole remainder of his life, nearly forty years, seems to have been one long deterioration from the man we see here. The downhill progress was slow, and occasionally he brought in some new quality to suggest that he was

again on the up grade. But those qualities are never strictly pictorial, and I think it is not too much to say that *as a painter* he was at his best in early youth, and that all the changes between 1655 and his death in 1693 were changes for the worse, so far as art, pure and simple, was concerned. The best pictures I know of his fine time, besides the National Gallery "Housewife," are "A Woman Suckling a Child," in Mrs. Joseph's collection, and a small girl minding a cradled baby in the collection of Lord Lansdowne. In one way the Bowood picture is even better than the "Dutch Housewife," for its handling is freer and more expressive. In this respect the National Gallery picture is strictly the work of a young man. The impasto is rich and solid, but the march of the brush is governed entirely by the desire to imitate. It has not yet become alive to its own esoteric capacity for personal expression.

The actual stages through which Maes retrogressed are difficult to describe. As a colourist he began with almost complete sanity. The "Dutch Housewife" is delightfully balanced. Looking at it in the light of what we know of his later years, we can detect a slight tendency to the red, and a still slighter one to the black, propensity. Each of these in turn was afterwards to throw him off his balance, and, in his last years, to unite in making his numerous portraits into combinations of cold red and black, so wanting in true feeling that some very good judges even now refuse to believe that the Maes of 1654 and the Maes of 1690 are one and the same man. The evidence against them is unhappily too strong. Maes can be traced in unbroken stages from the delicious works of his youth down to the coldest and most perfunctory productions of his fashionable old age. Even in the National Gallery, with its four pictures,¹ the direction and rapidity of his progress downwards can be traced. The "Dutch Housewife" and the "Idle Servant" are dated 1655; the "Child with a Cradle," 1656; while the man's portrait, given by Sir Theodore Martin, in which his black and red tendency has become strong, his impasto poor, and

¹ According to the catalogue there are five. But I fail to recognize any unmistakable characteristics of Maes in the large "Card Players," from Gatton Park. It may be by him, but if so, it is strange that he should have made his way through such a large and elaborate composition without leaving any decisive witness to his authorship in any part of it.

his tone cold, belongs to the year 1680. Maes, unhappily, must be set among the disappointers, among those men whose æsthetic gifts have not been supported by the right sort of character.

One small group of Dutch painters of the lower bourgeoisie remains to be noticed. It is not an interesting group from the æsthetic point of view, but for those who love to consider art as the servant of morality it ought to have a strong fascination. To preach morality by your art is futile. If the pictures in which you do so are good pictures, like those of Hogarth, they will come to be considered solely as works of art; if they are not good pictures, if they are like the "Diligent and Dissipated Maids" of Northcote, they will be thrown away and forgotten. But some moral virtues may be upheld by the way in which you paint. Patience is one of them, and surely no man ever had more of it than Dou, Slingelandt, and Schalcken. If conscience and the determination to do your very best are to be considered in our estimates of pictures, how are we to refuse a very high place to the painter of the "Femme Hydropique" of the Louvre, and the "Poulterer's Shop" of the Peel collection? It would be difficult to name many human productions in which the determination to be thorough, to make the completest use of such gifts as nature has vouchsafed, is more richly shown than in these two pictures. They are elaborately thought out, and painted until paint has little left to do. As examples of industry, of duty fulfilled, of single-minded conscientiousness, they have few superiors. But no one who can enjoy the creative powers of art cares to look at them twice, except as curiosities. Their careful arrangement does not amount to a design; their tints do not amount to colour; their handling is strictly imitative; and they show no gift for æsthetic selection. In short, they are monuments of an irrelevant virtue, and before them we have to say, not "See what patience can do," but "See how patience may be misused." One of the best of Schalcken's pictures is in the National Gallery of Ireland. Its subject is the restoration of a daughter by gipsies who had stolen her as a child. The girl sits among her recovered parents and bares her bosom to show the orthodox strawberry mark on her left breast. The said bosom, and the costumes of the parents, and a marble cistern in the foreground with

roses in it and a snail, shell laden, crawling on its brim, are painted with such minute fidelity that we are tempted to put them under the microscope and carry analysis beyond the point to which our eyes can reach. This kind of finish is pushed farthest by Schalcken, but occasionally Slingelandt runs him very close. Now and then, too, Slingelandt shows a glimmering of some more æsthetic virtue, and suggests that under better auspices he might have been a truer artist. I must not forget to confess that Dou sometimes deviates into art also. The pictures on which his fame was built up are mostly bores, but we can take real pleasure in such a thing as his own portrait in the National Gallery, or in the miniature supposed—I know not on what authority—to represent his wife, which hangs beside it. In both of these, but especially in his own portrait, good design is combined with expressive handling of the Hals-Teniers kind, and with colour which is at least not actively disagreeable. Dou was the pupil of Rembrandt; in his earlier pictures the tendency to a somewhat forced *chiaroscuro* and to monotonous brownness of tone, betray the small man who has grown up under the shadow of a great one, whom he feels bound to worship but cannot understand. The National Gallery portrait shows, however, that by the time he was thirty or thereabouts he had become acquainted with the wonderful portraits-in-little of Hals, and had tried to do something of the same kind before the mirror in his studio. In this instance he did not succeed too badly.

CHAPTER VI

The Landscape Painters

IT is difficult to say whether the most remarkable thing in Dutch landscape painting is regard for nature or neglect of it. From one point of view the better masters of the school were more consistently faithful to natural facts and less apt to divagate into the byways of fancy, than those who have since followed in their footsteps. Their conscious endeavour was to paint the constituents of landscape as they saw them. They arranged them, no doubt, into scenes not to be found in Holland, with occasional ornaments, such as Cuijp's mountains, not to be found anywhere. But on the whole they respected nature and made her their guide. On the other hand, few Dutch landscapes produce a natural impression. Not only was deliberate realism foreign to the Dutch genius, it resented, or at least neglected, those particular phenomena on which the unity of nature chiefly depends. The better artists painted trees more or less as they saw them, and sky, and water; but in their desire to win a perfect arabesque, they neglected atmosphere and the power it gives of bringing earth and sky into unity. If we except certain Cuijps and the miraculous "Delft" of Vermeer, no Dutch landscape seeks illusion. I do not mean to say that the creation of a *trompe l'œil* is among the duties of a landscape painter. If such a thing could be produced, it would not be a work of art at all. It is nevertheless strange that a body of painters which included De Hooghe and Vermeer, and watched fact, on the whole, with such curious eyes, should seldom have so dealt with landscape that we can enjoy their pictures from the two standpoints of art and nature simultaneously. Before a fine Constable we get the double pleasure—we can either look at it for its truth to an aspect of nature, or for the genius which brings all this truth into æsthetic unity, and avoids mere

realism. There is a certain Hampstead Heath by the Suffolk artist in the Victoria and Albert Museum. You can stand before it and fancy yourself looking through a window at the place itself. If you do, you will think the old white horse in the foreground a queer sort of beast, but otherwise you will get no shock. The eye adapts itself to the short scale of tones which is all that paint can give, and then travels out to Harrow, over the gorse, and sand, and shiny water, and rolling woods, as easily, and almost as gradually, as over the actual face of Middlesex. The Dutchmen give you none of this pleasure. Even Philips de Koninck, who deals in wide champaigns, has no reality. He leads your eye away to distant horizons, but does it by a kind of studio staircase of conventional planes. His pictures are as airless as the moon, although they often have fine skies. It is difficult to find a word or a phrase to describe Dutch landscape. We cannot call it conventional, like the backgrounds of the early schools, or decorative, like the landscapes of Titian, or realistic. In short, no objective formula will fit it, and we are reduced to describing it as entirely subjective in aim and partially realistic in method. The Dutchman conceived a landscape as a carver conceives a bench-end, and he carried it out by accepting all the relevant facts except those veils of air which have now become the main pre-occupation of the artist. To this the one conspicuous exception was Albert Cuijp, who stands to modern landscape in much the same relation as Velazquez does to our figure painting. Cuijp, Jakob Ruisdael, and Hobbema were the three first-rate men produced by the school, with a potential fourth in Jan van Goijen. These four men seem to me the only landscapists of their race, in the seventeenth century, who demand anything like elaborate study.

Jan Josefsz van Goijen was a sort of Dutch Georges Michel. He was the forerunner, and in some sort the creator, of later developments. His gifts were entirely right in kind, although they failed in quantity. Ambition, vigour, copiousness, courage were denied him, but what he saw was true and his aims were artistic. His best work, for what it is, could scarcely be improved. The late Mr. Roupell, of the Albany, had a collection of his smaller pictures and drawings which produced a remarkable impression when seen together. They showed Van Goijen to be a master of composition, of tone, of atmospheric effect, of drawing,

of handling.¹ To his want of a robust ambition we may ascribe his comparative failure in large compositions and the frequency of dully mechanical pictures, over-brown in tone. His inspiration did not persist long enough for complete success on a large surface, and he often turned out small panels with no sincere feeling in them at all. The eclipse from which his reputation has only emerged within the last few years was due to the number of these perfunctory works. Even now he is but ill represented in public collections. The large "Winter Scene" in the National Gallery, agreeable as it is in many ways, fails to show that perfect unity and pictorial repose which marks so many of his smaller works. Van Goijen was born as early as 1596. His real master was Esaias van de Velde, with whom, however, he did not place himself until he was twenty-one. His life was passed at Leyden and the Hague, and the subjects he loved are nearly all to be found within a short distance of these two centres. Jan Steen was his son-in-law, so we may fairly conclude that his influence had easy access to the multiplying studios of South Holland.

One of these studios was that of the great master of Dordrecht, Albert Cuijp. There is no record, so far as I know, of Cuijp having studied under Van Goijen, but a glance at his earliest pictures is enough to show that he was at least his humble follower. Cuijp began by working in a style scarcely to be distinguished from that of the older man. One of his earliest pictures is in the collection of Mr. Van Alen, and was shown at the Old Masters some two years ago. Had it not been signed with an obviously genuine signature it would most likely have passed as a Van Goijen; although, it must be confessed, it showed differences which might have caused some uneasiness in those making the ascription. It was not composed like a Van Goijen, its colour tendency was towards yellow instead of towards a cool brown, and its handling, although obviously based on its model, was not identical with it. Out of this manner Cuijp grew steadily, but slowly. If we could collect all his pictures, we should probably find that each embodied an advance towards his own distinctive manner—which, unhappily, was again to yield, at the end of his life, to a borrowed style. The best

¹ The gems of this collection are now to be found in the possession of Mr. J. P. Heseltine, Mrs. Joseph, and, I believe, Mr. van Alen, who also has a fine marine from the Burrell Collection.

picture known to me of his early period is the large landscape, with cows being milked, in Bridgewater House. Here we still find the extreme restraint in colour, the small stringy touch, the preoccupation with tone ; in composition, however, it far excels anything done on a similar scale by Van Goijen.¹

The portrait of a man in the National Gallery, which is dated 1649, probably marks the point, so far as it was a point, where Cuijp's first style began to lose itself in his second. In colour and in the details of handling we can still recognize the Van Goijen stage, but the whole is seen with a new breadth, so that conception and execution are now at peace with each other.² The transition was soon passed, for the number of pictures in which both first and second styles are to be traced is comparatively small. Knowing what we do of Cuijp's docility, we may suspect that the adoption of the great style of his maturity was not entirely his own doing. It is quite possible that some picture by De Hooghe, with whose early manner his own second style has a striking affinity, may have applied the match. For a man who could exploit Van Goijen, in his youth, and Wouwerman in his old age, as Cuijp most assuredly did, it would be easy to seize upon the sunlight of a master ten years his junior, and determine to do for the wide landscapes of the Maas what De Hooghe was doing for the gardens and parlours of Delft. That, however, by the way : it is only a guess. What we know is that when Cuijp was from about thirty to thirty-five years of age he began to concentrate his powers on the problem of sunlight in the open air, and that for a quarter of a century, perhaps, he gave it his undivided attention. His fame rests on the pictures produced during these five-and-twenty years. They are curiously faithful to the one ideal. It is, of course, possible to trace their chronology, for no man is stationary. But within his periods Cuijp moved less obviously than most. His three manners are quite distinct and the transitions from one to the other more abrupt than usual. But there is affiliation ; and if all

¹ The same group of cows and milkmaid is used in a smaller picture in the National Gallery of Ireland, and in another, if I may trust my memory, in the Hermitage.

² I am aware that some connoisseurs are unable to see Cuijp in this portrait at all, but to me scepticism seems out of place. The picture is unique, no doubt, but its colour is enough to show its origin, and the signature is unattackable.

his works could be brought together, it would not be difficult, I think, to arrange them approximately in order of production.

The middle period alone is well represented in our National Collections. All the pictures in the National Gallery, with the exception of the portrait already mentioned, belong to it. Three of them show him at his best. These are the large "Landscape, with Cattle and Figures," formerly in the Angerstein Collection, the "River Scene with Cattle," and the "Ruined Castle on a Lake," both in the Peel collection. The two pictures of Dordrecht, the "Large Dort" and the "Small Dort," bequeathed by Mr. Wynn Ellis, are more famous, but in quality they are scarcely so fine as the others. In all of these the real preoccupation of the artist has been with light in its most agreeable form, the golden light of a summer afternoon. Being essentially an artist, with good traditions all about him, he paints simply, directly, without effort or pretension, but his thoughts are fixed on atmospheric effect and its successful rendering. Now and then he makes an unhappy colour experiment—or time has made it for him. In one, at least, of the Dulwich pictures a metallic green has made away with "keeping," and turned what was meant for a specially fresh and dewy picture into a hard and gaudy one.

The most covetable of all the National Gallery Cuijps, according to my taste, is the little "Castle in a Lake." It probably shows how his work looked when new better than any of the others. It is apparently simple, almost *naïf*, in composition, but most effective, the only doubtful notes being struck by the little figures and cows on the farther side of the lake. Nothing could be finer than the golden glow over this little panel. The gradation of the haze is perfect, and makes us wish we had a Cuijp living here in London, to do justice to the wonderful atmosphere we have on what we call a clear day in September.

Cuijp's last and worst style is but little represented in our English collections. It seems to have been brought about by the influence of Philips Wouwerman. The two men were practically of the same age. Wouwerman is said to have spent the whole of his life at Haarlem, but no great distance separated that city from Dordrecht even in the seventeenth century, and it can scarcely be doubted that the two men were known to each other, at least in their works. In any case it is impossible

to ignore the connexion between the later battle and hunting pieces of the Haarlem master and similar things signed A. C., the form of signature adopted by Cuijp in his old age. They are alike in conception and in technical methods. They are painted, for instance, on dark grounds, which are responsible for their unpleasant lowness of tone. All the changes from the manner of the "Castle in the Lake" are towards Wouwerman, and away from anything he had done before. If it were not for the comparatively broad handling, some "A.C." Cuijps might almost be mistaken for the work of Wouwerman. It is one of the most curious things in the whole history of art, that a man of genius, who had endowed the world with such brilliant pages of nature as the pictures at Dulwich, at Bridgwater House, in the National Gallery, at Dorchester House, and in the Louvre, should have enrolled himself in his old age among the imitators of a man of talent.

The second of our three great and original Dutchmen, Jakob Ruisdael, or Ruijsdael,¹ was eight or nine years younger than Cuijp. The facts of his life are still involved in very great obscurity. He is said to have been the pupil of his father, Isaak, to whom many pictures are ascribed which are clearly youthful productions of the son. At the same time we are told that this same father intended him for the medical profession, and that a degree was actually taken, or at least assumed, for he was called "Dr." Judging from his works alone, we should say that he was at first the pupil of his uncle, Solomon Ruisdael, who had become a member of the Haarlem Guild in 1623; and that he was influenced in later years by Allaert van Everdingen, who had brought a breath of Norway, with its pines and tumbling waters, into the flats of Holland. The story of his life, so far as we know it, is short and simple. Born at Haarlem about 1628, he lived there until 1659, when he moved to Amsterdam. His life was one long struggle with poverty, and he died in an almshouse in 1682.

As a painter the most obvious thing about him is the decision with which he knew his own mind. From first to last he changes less, perhaps, than any other great artist. The student can tell easily enough whether he is looking at an early or a late Ruisdael, but the differences

¹ It is curious that these two ways of spelling the name should have been used indifferently by its owner, for they involve, strictly speaking, two different pronunciations.

are matters of detail. In his youth he painted tightly, a little stolidly, with over-much care for the accidental fact. His skies are deprived of their depth by torn flakes of sometimes woolly cloud. His composition is often crowded, and his colour has tendencies—tendencies to brown, to green, to blue. As the years pass, his conceptions become simpler, more easily taken in at a glance. His skies deepen, and the clouds hang in them in true perspective and in three dimensions. He never loses his greenness or even brownness, but our desire to call them tendencies disappears. They are part of his individuality, which we begin to accept with gratitude. The charm of light creeps over him, and although he never learns to use the real sun, he brings in gleams to decompose and deepen the solemnity of his shadow. Last of all he lifts his eyes higher above the horizon, and paints those delicious pictures in which a great sky, a sort of cloud forest, hangs over the plain of Haarlem, one beam from the sun falling, like benevolent lightning, on the great church, on the red roofs of the city, on some bleaching ground in the suburbs. Here we have none of Cuijp's vacillation. The grave mind of Ruisdael understands from the beginning what it means to make with nature. He knows what aspects please him, and as soon as he has felt his way through the initial difficulties of his *métier*, he sets to work to convey his message. It was not his fault if his fellow-countrymen declined to receive it.

He has been reproached with his want of variety; but very great artists are never really various. Objective variety, of course, is easy. Sir Joshua found no difficulty in avoiding the stereotyped in pose and colour, but his essential message is always the same. So is that of Gainsborough, who seldom troubled much over even objective variety. Rembrandt is not various, Constable is not various, Corot is not various. Turner had more variety than any one else of the first rank, and that is one of the signs of the objectivity, the desire to illustrate rather than to make, on which I have insisted elsewhere.¹ The kind of monotony of which people complain in Ruisdael is neither more nor less than the domination of his personality. He could not play monkey tricks with landscape. The passion with which it inspired him was the passion he meant to express. It would not be denied. It was so profound, and grave, and sane, that it coloured his world, and made

¹ Turner. Agnews, 1902.

his pictures richer in character, deeper in feeling, more tense in expression than those of any other landscape painter.

To turn from considerations like these to purely technical matters feels like a *bathos*, but a word has to be said on a proceeding of Ruisdael's which must, in the long run, diminish the charm of some of his most delightful pictures. This, of course, was his habit of painting on a dark ground. This time-saving process came into great favour in Holland in the third quarter of the seventeenth century. It is responsible for the want of light in so many of the pictures painted after about 1660, De Hooghes, Cuijps, Wouwermans, Ruisdaels, etc. Ruisdael took to a dark ground and thinned his impasto at the same time, so that occasionally we find in his later pictures no real light anywhere but on the clouds (*cumuli*), which, being painted in almost solid white, have alone resisted the invading darkness. Sometimes, however, pictures painted on a light ground have darkened too.

The National Gallery owns thirteen Ruisdaels. Fourteen are enumerated in the catalogue, but one, No. 628, is a copy. The best perhaps, in quality, are the "Waterfall," No. 737, bequeathed by Mr. Oppenheim; the "Landscape with Waterfall" (No. 627), the "Waterfall" (No. 855), in the Peel Collection, and the small picture of "An Old Oak" (No. 988) in the Wynn Ellis collection. The large Wynn Ellis picture of the country round Haarlem (990) was probably a masterpiece when new, but is now disagreeably black and dead.

Hobbema is one of the many Dutch painters whom the English were the first to appreciate. As in the cases of Cuijp and De Hooghe, the great majority of his pictures were in this country down to some seventy years ago. Even now, when so many have returned to the continent or crossed the Atlantic, we probably still possess more than half his production. Down to the publication of *Modern Painters*, he was widely accepted as the greatest artist who ever touched landscape, with the exception of Claude. Between 1850 and 1880 or thereabouts, his fame was under some little eclipse, but with the growth of truer ideas as to what constitutes a fine work of art, it has again risen, and now stands almost where it did before Ruskin wrote. If we accept the theory that the aim, as well as the method, of landscape painting is



RIVER SCENE WITH CATTLE. By A. Cuijp. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstängl.





RUINED CASTLE IN A LAKE. By A. Cuijp. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstängl.



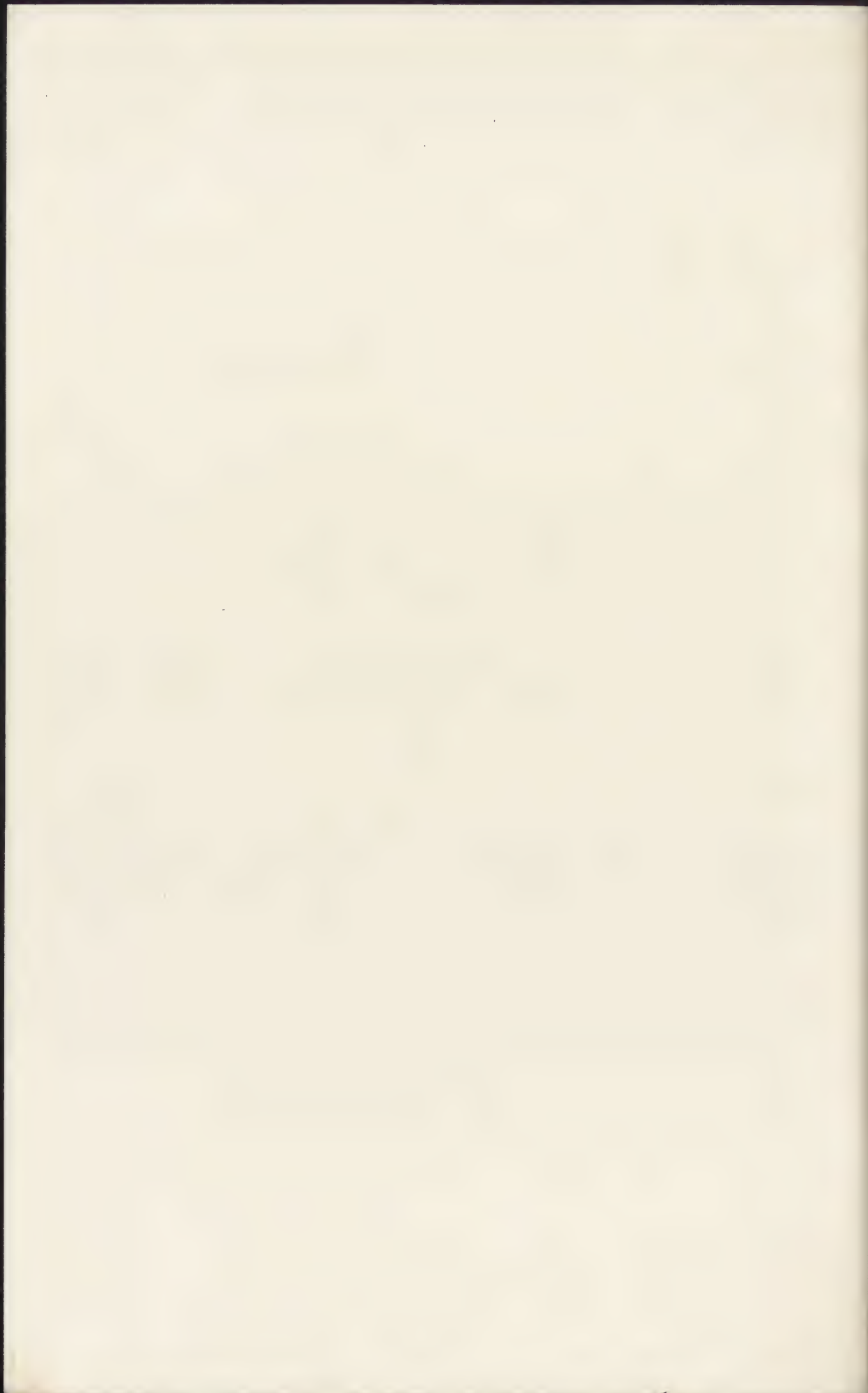


A WATERFALL. *By Jakob Van Ruisdael. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstaengl.*





A STREET IN COLOGNE. By J. Van der Heide.



the telling of as much truth as possible about nature, then indeed we are forced to depose Hobbema. We cannot deny that Ruskin's strictures are true as matters of fact, and that the Dutchman's rendering of natural beauty has neither the frankness of Constable nor the ambition of Turner. But then we do not accept this theory of a landscape painter's aim. He, like all other artists, sets out to create beauty, not to imitate it. He uses natural appearances as his medium, he does not adopt them as his end. He sits down before a scene in nature not to transfer as much of it as possible to canvas, but to select from it those elements which will assist him in producing a new creation, a page in which the dominating factor is his own passion and his own conception of æsthetic unity. Ruisdael wins this unity by impressing his own gravity and nobility of spirit on nature. Hobbema does it by arranging his into an almost sculpturesque concentration of pattern, by clothing her in a visible garment of satisfaction with things as they are, by enhancing her sense of repose. To show that Hobbema's leaves are greenless, that his twigs shoot from their stems at unholy angles, that his trunks taper wrongly, and that his earth would be unclassifiable by the geologist, is irrelevant labour. Hobbema's object was not to instruct us on matters like these. His object was to create, in paint, an object which should be beautiful for the same reason—not *in the same way*—as a natural object, say a fine horse. He set out in fact to make something in which the intrinsic harmony of the parts should result in an organic whole. Being an artist, he thought always of the picture, and of nature only so far as his choice of her as a medium made such thinking necessary. Ruskin describes a great artist as one who always thinks of nature, never of his picture. In one sense, no doubt, he is right. The art of a great artist is instinctive. He does not require to think deliberately about it. It rises in him like the water in a well. All he does is under its compulsion, and all his selections are made by its guidance. His conscious thinking is directed to his model, whether that be a landscape, or a human being, or a vase of flowers. But in the sense in which Ruskin used the phrase it is the reverse of the truth. We may say without any hesitation whatever that the true artist always thinks first of what he is making, and secondly of the natural objects he is pressing into the service. Every Art which works through imitation is full of sacrifice, but the sacrifice

must always be made by the thing imitated. The man who would sacrifice either the unity or the personality of his art to the mere natural fact has nothing to say with paint. He will, of course, select his subjects so that sacrifice may be reduced to a minimum, but the inevitable tribute must be paid on the imitative, and not on the creative side, Hobbema's pictures are beautiful things not *because* they are like nature, but because they obey the laws which make nature beautiful too.

In writing about them, or, indeed, about any picture, it is difficult to avoid an apparent ambiguity, for if a painter's *art* is mostly spontaneous, it is for the same reason difficult to analyse in words, and discussion is apt to direct itself towards those imitative features which are embellishments of art rather than its essence. As an artist Hobbema is nearly always at his own high level. His design seldom fails either in grace or unity. Even when he takes a subject ugly in itself, like the road to Middelharnis, he contrives to clothe it in linear charm by the just choice of a point of view, and by the design of the one free element in the composition, the sky. The judgment which governs all this is repeated in the minor details of execution, in the handling, especially of the ground, in the modification of the natural colour, and in the aerial perspective. Compare this "Avenue" with Cuijp's treatment of an almost identical subject in the Wallace collection, and you will see how infinitely greater in design the younger master was. So good, in short, are nearly all his conceptions in their quiet way, that comparisons of one with another have perforce to be based on those imitative qualities which are the accidents rather than the essentials of art. Of the five true Hobbemas in the National Gallery, it is difficult to say that one is any better than another, as a design. The "Avenue" is the most original, and overcomes difficulties which most painters would shirk, but the unity arrived at is no finer than that of the three Peel pictures. One of these, indeed, suffers from the interference of a poultry painter in the foreground,¹ whose ducks are neither good nor wanted. Otherwise they are all excellent designs. Something, it is difficult to say what, has happened to the sky of No. 685, the first Hobbema to enter the gallery; while of the

¹ These birds are not by Wijntranck, to whom the catalogue ascribes them. His woolly touch, once seen, is quite unmistakeable. A signed picture by him—the only one I ever saw, is at Powerscourt.



must always be made by the thing imitated. The man who would sacrifice either the unity or the personality of his art to the mere natural fact has nothing to say with paint. He will, of course, select his subjects so that sacrifice may be reduced to a minimum, but the inevitable tribute must be paid on the imitative, and not on the creative side, Hobbema's pictures are beautiful things not *because* they are like nature, but because they obey the laws which make nature beautiful too.

In writing about them, or, indeed, about any picture, it is difficult to avoid an apparent ambiguity, for if a painter's *art* is mostly spontaneous, it is for the same reason difficult to analyse in words, and discussion is apt to direct itself towards those imitative features which are embellishments of art rather than its essence. As an artist Hobbema is nearly always at his own high level. His design seldom fails either in grace or unity. Even when he takes a subject ugly in itself, like the road to Middelharnis, he contrives to clothe it in linear charm by the just choice of a point of view, and by the design of the one free element in the composition, the sky. The judgment which governs all this is repeated in the minor details of execution, in the handling, especially of the ground, in the modification of the natural colour, and in the aerial perspective. Compare this "Avenue" with Cuijp's treatment of an almost identical subject in the Wallace collection, and you will see how infinitely greater in design the younger master was. So good, in short, are nearly all his conceptions in their quiet way, that comparisons of one with another have perforce to be based on those imitative qualities which are the accidents rather than the essentials of art. Of the five true Hobbemas in the National Gallery, it is difficult to say that one is any better than another, as a design. The "Avenue" is the most original, and overcomes difficulties which most painters would shirk, but the unity arrived at is no finer than that of the three Peel pictures. One of these, indeed, suffers from the interference of a poultry painter in the foreground,¹ whose ducks are neither good nor wanted. Otherwise they are all excellent designs. Something, it is difficult to say what, has happened to the sky of No. 685, the first Hobbema to enter the gallery; while of the

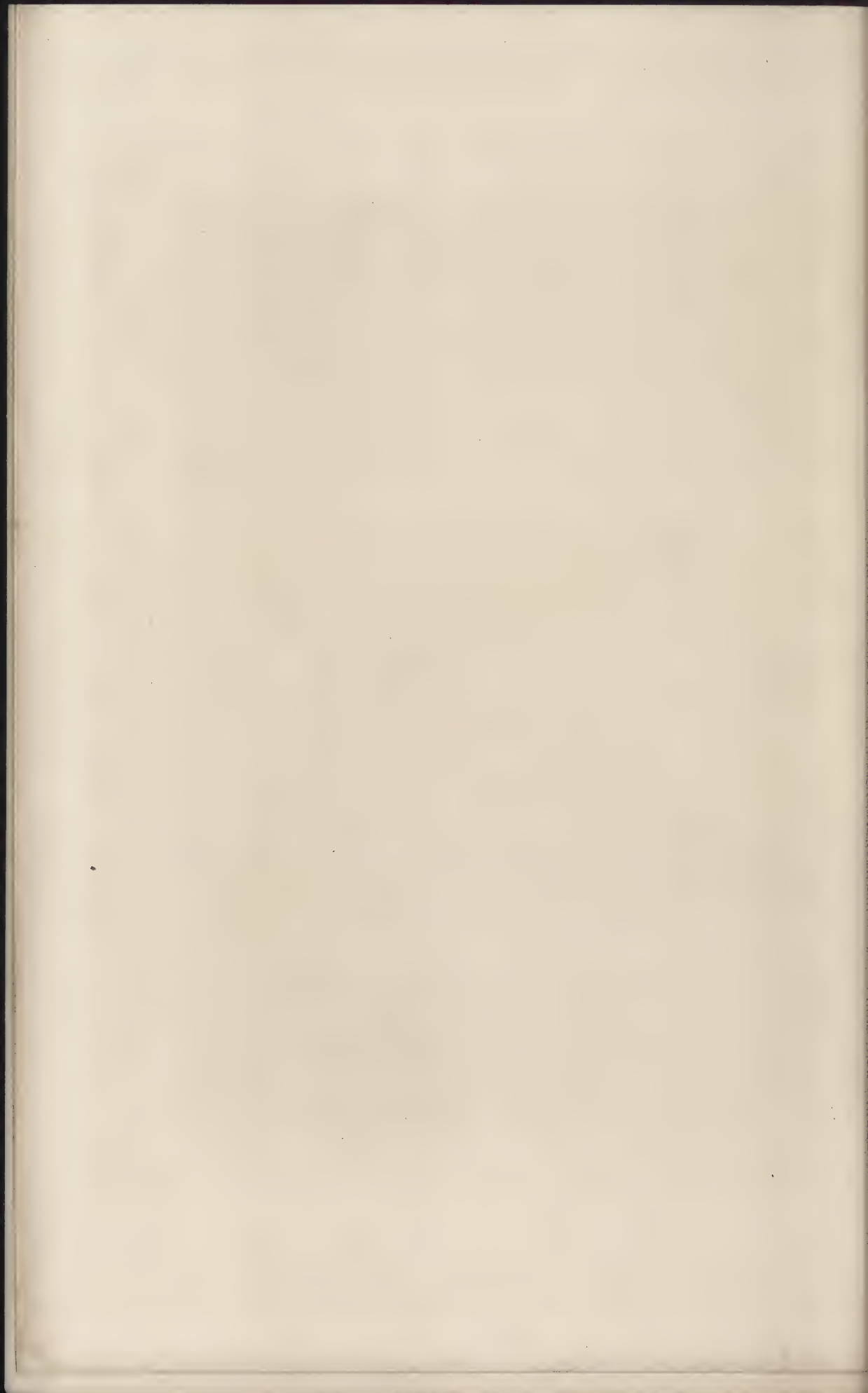
¹ These birds are not by Wijntranck, to whom the catalogue ascribes them. His woolly touch, once seen, is quite unmistakeable. A signed picture by him—the only one I ever saw, is at Powerscourt.



The Adelphi Company, Phila.

W. H. Johnson, New York

The Avenue.



two bequeathed by Mr. Wynn Ellis, one has darkened disagreeably and the other is unimportant. The finest Hobbema I know belongs to Lord Feversham, and hangs at Duncombe Park, in Yorkshire. As good in conception as anything he ever did, it excels in atmospheric truth, and in a certain dewy freshness which is the rarest quality in an old master—or new one either, for that matter.

CHAPTER VII

City Painters—Sea Painters—Animal Painters— Painters of Still Life

SOME of the Dutchmen who painted the insides and outsides of buildings were artists of little less than the first rank. Emmanuel de Witte, Geeraert Hoekgheest, and Jan van der Heijde, have left pictures behind them worthy to hang beside those of Ruisdael or Hobbema. Unfortunately, they are all three very unequal, and rise but seldom to their own highest level. Neither van der Heijde nor De Witte are at their best in the National Gallery, while Hoekgheest is not there at all. The Van der Heijde in the Peel collection, which we reproduce, is well though rather formally composed, but its handling is dry and its colour wanting in the depth and flow of his best works. The finest I know are the "View in Amsterdam," in the collection of Mr. A. J. Robarts, and "An Amsterdam Canal," in the Duke of Arenberg's gallery at Brussels. These are both well composed—a comparatively rare virtue with Van der Heijde—and delightful in colour, the impression of sunlight being almost as vivid as in a fine De Hooghe. Another good example, the "Roosengracht" in the Wallace collection, is but little inferior to these two.

A better picture-inventor than Van der Heijde was the Haarlem master, Gerrit Adriaensz Berckheijde, whose design—so far as the selection of a point of view and the occupation of a panel can be called design—was nearly always good. His pictures of the Haarlem market-place, and of the Dam at Amsterdam, are full of breadth and dignity. As a colourist, however, he is far inferior to Van der Heijde, while as an executant he is rather dry and thin. The two pictures by him in the National Gallery show him at his best. Van der Heijde and Berckheijde started a school which persisted down almost to our own

day, without, however, producing any considerable artist until the days of Bosboom and Mathew Maris.

The painters of interiors had their freedom even more closely curtailed than the painters of streets. The inside of a church gives less opportunity for personal expression than a group of buildings, and so the few artists who have contrived to impress their individuality on such things deserve all the more honour. Best of them all, at his best, is Emmanuel de Witte. He saw the inside of a church as Ruisdael saw a landscape. His tendency was to deepen its solemnity, to enhance the shadows and reduce the points of light, and to strike grave notes in his colour. His better works, such as the two in Lord Northbrook's collection and a large interior of a drawing-room, which was sold at Christie's as a De Hooghe some eight or nine years ago, have a perfect unity in their grave repose. The one De Witte in the National Gallery shows him to no advantage. Very different was the system of Geeraert van Hoegheest, who set himself to render a church as a sun-trap with all the vigour he could muster. Like De Witte, he was most unequal, but his better pictures have scarcely been excelled in the force with which they present the fact. Two interiors of the Nieuwe Kerk of Delft, in the Mauritshuis and the Rijks-museum respectively, startle one by their veracity. And yet they are works of art, for such personal expression as the subject allows is there. It is easy to go wrong, even over such an apparently self-justifying theme as the inside of a church. A mistaken standpoint, an hour of the day when the light and shadow are unhappily divided, figures badly placed, too much floor or too much wall; pitfalls are plentiful, and the painter who avoids them all on his way to unity is an artist. It is a pity we have no Hoegheest in Trafalgar Square; but they are rare things, and when the Messchaert van Vollenhoven picture was allowed to go into the Rijks-museum, the only opportunity for getting a fine example which has occurred within my recollection was lost. It is true that the Dutchmen paid what was then an enormous price for it.

Another painter of church interiors who had a modest individuality of his own was Anton Delorme, whose name is frequent enough in catalogues, although his works are rare. For some reason not easy to discover, many pictures by the De Neefs, and others by Van Bassen, pass

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under his name. As a matter of fact, his style is peculiarly easy of recognition, and his subject is nearly always the interior of the Groote Kerk of Rotterdam or one of its satellites. He is quite free from the brownness of the Flemish painters of interiors. His tones are generally high, he loves air and space, he never shirks an ugly detail, but depends on his own controlling power to keep it in order. His work is to be found in very few galleries. A very good example is in the National Gallery of Ireland, but he is absent from Trafalgar Square. The remaining painters of architectural interiors are not of much interest. Sanredam, indeed, had feeling, but Hendrik van der Vliet was little more than a mechanic, in spite of his un-Dutch versatility.

The sea painters of Holland have suffered more than any one else from the strictures of Ruskin, and, on the whole, it is difficult to say that he treated them unfairly. If the imitation of nature be not the aim of the landscape painter, it is undeniably his means, and he should so use natural facts that we may pass through them contentedly to enjoy his art. It is not the final aim of a novelist to make his people talk as they would in real life, but unless he does so with a reasonable fidelity, one cannot enjoy the story he has to tell. So with a picture. Unless it is professedly and entirely conventional, we demand sufficient truth to give us confidence in the artist's power of observation before we can abandon ourselves to the enjoyment of his personal gloss. The great landscape painters submit to this necessity. Before a Cuijp, a Ruisdael, or a Hobbema, we feel that the artist knows what he is doing. His omissions are obviously deliberate, his selections governed by judgment. We do not feel this with the sea painters. The idea they too often suggest is that the sea is neither familiar nor welcome. "Your Grace is too difficult for me!" said Gainsborough before the Duchess of Devonshire, and we can hear the Dutchmen using the same phrase to the sea. They may have painted in open boats at the risk of their lives, but they never lighted on a formula—to put it so low—for the wetness, or the mass, or the indifference, or the chill, or the obedience to moon and wind, of the sea. Their sea pieces are not all bad by any means, but so far as they depend on the sea itself, they are never good. Willem van de Velde, Jan van de Capelle, Simon de

Vlieger, Hendrik Dubbels, and one or two more, have left us many nice pictures in which the sea supplies a sort of floor. But the goodness is always in the sky, or the atmosphere, or the pattern and movement of the ships. The man who took the most trouble of them all, if we believe tradition—I mean Ruskin's "Back-something," Ludolf Backhuijzen—did the most unhappy work. Taking them all round, we find more truth, more sympathy with nature, in the best pictures of De Vlieger, than in any of the others. Unfortunately, he was not often at his best; still more unfortunately, his fine things are not seldom filched from him and given to men with greater names. Jakob Ruysdael's marines seem to have been usually studied from the Haarlemer Meer. His tempests snarl, they do not threaten to overwhelm; his coasts are shores, with no hint of tides. As for Willem van de Velde, his work charms in proportion to the success with which he suppresses the sea, as sea. His dead calms, with a vaporous air beneath a high dome of sky, with ships lazily swinging to their anchors as they fire a promiscuous gun, with boats putting off from the land and the heavy Dutch ensigns trailing in their wake: in things like these we can take a sober pleasure. A very good one is "Dutch Shipping, Vessels Saluting" (No. 978), in the National Gallery. It belongs to the Wynn Ellis collection. Those in the Peel collection are not so good. The one here reproduced shows him at his best however, when attempting to deal with a stormy sea.

With the animal painters we rise again to a higher plane. Not that the gift for art discernible in De Witte or Van der Heijde is small, but that architecture is too confining a theme for freedom in expression. The man who paints monuments paints in fetters. His design has to sink to the level of draughtsmanship, his composition to become arrangement, his colour to substitute restraint for the free expression of feeling. It is all a matter of degree, of course. So long as painting involves reproduction of objects it can never be entirely its own law, like music. But one set of themes allows more freedom than another, and, assuming an equal gift, the painter of free objects will express himself more completely than the man who paints unchangeable things.

The most famous of the Dutch *animaliers* was, no doubt, Paul Potter.

His name has become a kind of symbol for the art he practised, just as that of Raphael has for the illustration of religion. But the finest animal painter of Holland was not Potter, but Cuijp. A man's powers must be judged by his best work. Now Albert Cuijp has left us a few pictures of cows, of horses, of poultry, which are painted in a way that has seldom been equalled. Géricault used to say that he could not sleep o' nights for thinking of Cuijp's horses. Sprinkled about European galleries there is a certain population of cows and horses, and cocks and hens, signed sometimes A. Cuijp, sometimes A. C., which, looked at merely as examples of what a paint-brush can do, need fear comparison with nothing that ever came out of a studio. The most accessible to the English lover of pictures are two at Dulwich, a byre and a stable. If we think only of rendering, and of such immediately expressive qualities as good arrangement and colour, we have to confess that these little pictures fill every demand we can make on a painter. The subjects are humble, calling for neither learning, nor imagination, nor idealism. But these, and other things like them, prove that at the time when Cuijp was about to desert his splendid second manner for his disastrous third, he was at the summit of his powers and was a more consummate master of his material than any other Dutchman, with the exceptions of Metsu, Vermeer, and Jan Steen. This manner of Cuijp is not represented in the National Gallery at all, for the little picture lent by the Victoria and Albert Museum cannot be accepted as his.¹

The fame of Paul Potter is mostly a survival from the days when Gerard Dou and Frans Mieris were two of the most fashionable masters of the school. Many of his pictures, including the notorious "Bull," are scarcely works of art at all. They are monuments of patience, of skill, of judgment in selection. Unhappily his selection is not strictly that of the artist. He selects for the sake of imitation, not for that of æsthetic unity. He cannot hope to paint every hair on a cow's back, so he elaborates a touch to suggest them. But the touch has no charm in itself—it expresses hair, but not Paul Potter, which means that Potter had nothing but hair to express. The interest of his pictures is always objective. We enjoy them, so far as we enjoy them at all, for the

¹ Hung as it is, this picture does not confess its authorship very clearly, but it seems to be the work of Pieter Potter, the father of Paul,



A GALE. By Willem Van de Velde. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstaengl.





LANDSCAPE WITH CATTLE. *By Paul Potter. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstaengl.*



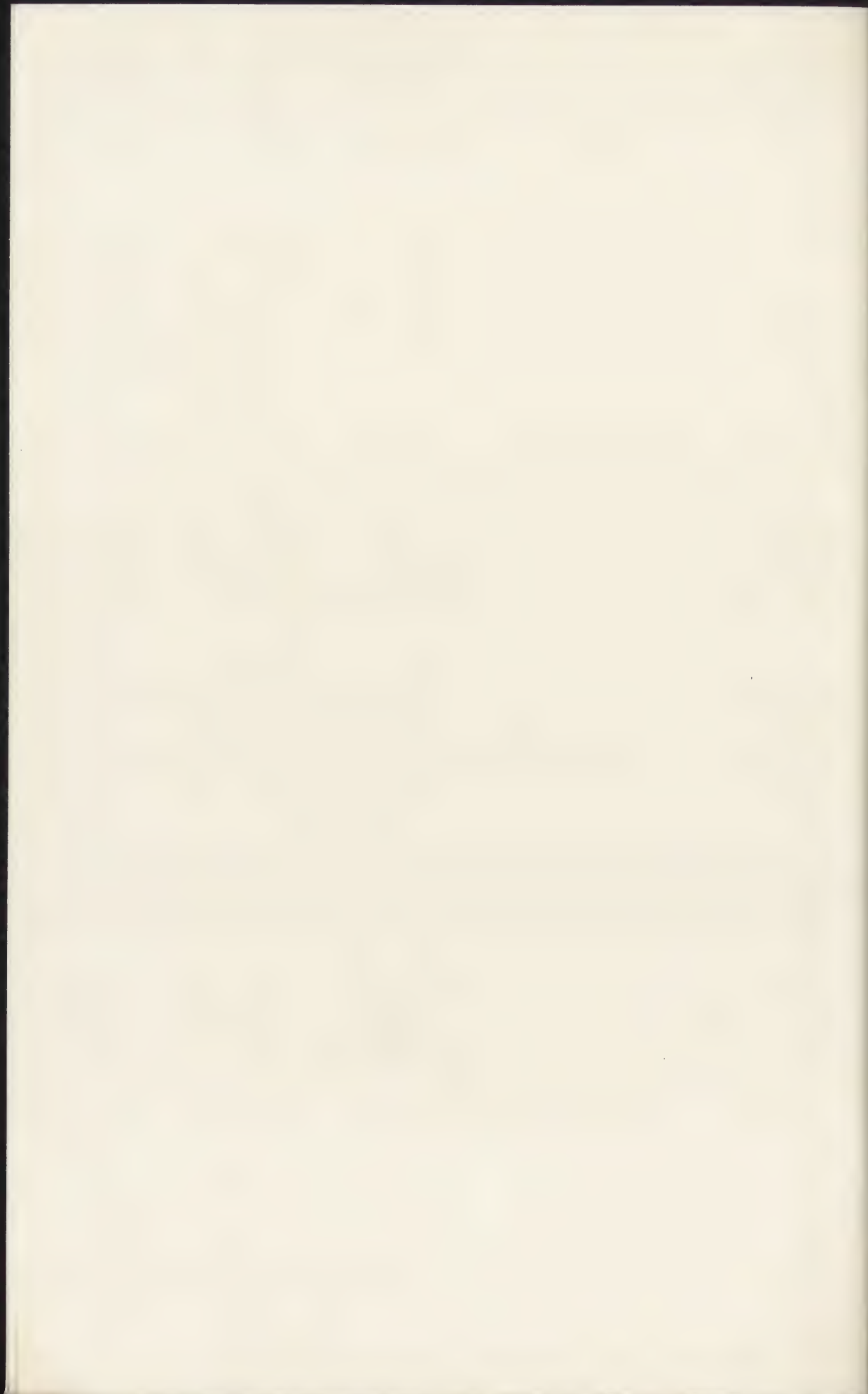


FROST SCENE. By Adriaen Van de Velde. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstaeigl.





THE FARM COTTAGE. By Adriaen Van de Veldt. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstuengl



pale reflection they give of what we may still see from a train in Holland. Take the famous "*Vache qui se mire*," at the Hague. It might be called "*Le paysage qui se mire—très mal*." We might get something like it if we held up a steel mirror to a Dutch meadow. It shows no human personality. It is the work of one who patiently pursued the fact, but had nothing to say with it when caught. It is the same with nearly all Potter's pictures. The series at Petersburg¹ has a great reputation, possibly because so few people have seen it. But it does nothing to raise his character above the level shown by his work nearer home. In fact it seems to me that he touches as high a level of art in the picture we owe to Sir Robert Peel as in anything else he did. It is well composed, for a Potter, warm in colour and not devoid of atmosphere, while the beasts are wonderfully drawn.

Inferior as a draughtsman to Potter, Adriaen van de Velde excelled him in other things. Without being in any sense a great artist, he always contrived to breathe a little of the true spirit into his work. His pictures are not exciting. They awake no strong emotion, they do not stir us to the painful covetousness we feel before a fine Vermeer or De Hooghe. But they satisfy our judgment and soothe our feelings, so far as they go. Six of the National Gallery pictures represent him fairly well. The "*Farm Cottage*" and the "*Frost Scene*," both in the Peel collection, are perhaps the best. A seventh picture, a "*Landscape with Cattle*," bequeathed by Wynn Ellis, is of less interest. Adriaen's taste was never better shown than in the figures with which he enriched the landscapes of other men. Sometimes these are of quite extraordinary felicity. In the "*Roosengracht*" Van der Heijde, for instance, already mentioned, he has introduced a little group of people walking out of the picture, close to the frame. It required a very exact perception of the note struck by his colleague to venture on such a device. Scarcely less happy are the figures in the "*Cologne*" Van der Heijde, of the Peel collection.

Philips Wouwerman has already been discussed at such length that little further need be said about him. The history of art contains few things more surprising than the tale of his industry. During a life of

¹ The Hermitage possesses nine pictures by Paul Potter.

less than fifty years he painted 600 pictures, at the lowest computation. Whatever we may think of their art, we can deny to none of these the praise which belongs to a task conscientiously carried out. He did mistaken things—when he painted, for instance, on a dark ground—but he never failed to put conscience into his work, or to give to his clients what they had a right to look for. You may say that such praise is irrelevant, and so, of course, it is ; but after all it is difficult for any man to have some quality in a supreme degree without having a touch of others besides. And although Wouwerman was not a great artist, he had some artistic gifts. The picture called “ On the Sea-shore ” (880), in the Peel Collection, is well composed, and quite wonderfully painted from the standpoint of what Mr. Berenson calls “ tactile values.” The foreshortening of the white horse is a marvel. You can measure his length, from the root of his tail to the tip of his nose. Wouwerman was also a good composer, of the arranging sort, and for the most part a pleasant colourist. His best pupil—I am calling him so entirely on internal evidence—was Jan Wynants, whose landscapes he occasionally provided with a population.

Karel Dujardin was a colder and more academical person than Wouwerman, and should, perhaps, have been mentioned in connexion with Paul Potter. Not that they had anything to do with each other, but simply because their view of what constitutes a picture had a good deal in common. Some Dujardins are only to be distinguished from Potters by the greater breadth of their handling, and by a tendency to the blocky rather than the spidery in the forms of animals. The picture in the Peel collection, here reproduced, is practically in the manner of Potter, but is better composed, warmer in tone, and less petty in execution than things like the “ Vache qui se mire.” Karel frequently painted on a large scale, but, like nearly all his fellow-countrymen, he lost his charm when he did so.¹

A section of the Dutch school which is very ill represented in the public collections of the United Kingdom is that of the flower and still-

¹ A picture with life-size figures is at Bear Wood, in the collection of Mr. Walter. The half-length portrait ascribed to Karel in the National Gallery does not appear to me to be a Dutch picture.

life painters. Many of these were men of skill and taste, but nothing more. Others, however, contrived to show fine artistic gifts in their treatment of the day's dessert, or of a few objects from the sideboard. The flower painters all belonged to the former class. Not one of them ever produced a flower piece which could be set beside those of Fantin-Latour, of Diaz, or even of James Holland, as a work of art.

The two De Heems, Abraham Mignon, Rachel Ruysch, the Van Huysums, and Jan van Os, were all born too late, except the De Heems. By the time they came into the world a high finish had become the one popular quality in Dutch painting. Their notion of a picture was to arrange a crowd of flowers into a group of bold and not seldom discordant colour contrasts, and then to imitate for their lives. The earlier men preferred other things to flowers. Pieter Claesz, the father of Berchem, Willem Claesz Heda, Abraham van Beijeren, Willem Kalf, Jan van de Velde, all these were true artists, who selected their objects for pictorial reasons, and so treated them as to produce vivid pages of æsthetic unity. Pieter Claesz and Willem Heda were to the later men what Van Goijen was to Cuijp. Their art is strictly restrained, dealing little in elaborate composition or positive colour. But to those who can see beyond a "subject," the better works of Pieter Claesz, especially, are most attractive through their fine tone and frank simplicity of execution. The best I know belongs to Dr. Hölscher, at Mühleim, near Cologne. It is dated 1645.

To those who insist on believing that art is the reproduction of natural beauty, no more useful object lesson could be given, perhaps, than the putting side by side of a gorgeous flower group by Van Huysum and a quiet still life by Pieter Claesz. In the one case you would see some of the most beautiful objects in nature reproduced with extraordinary fidelity; in the other, a battered mug, a fruit knife, a few slices of ham, a roll, a napkin, and perhaps a few leaves, translated into vehicles for light and shadow, and for that garment of uniting tone which is part of his aim. And yet between the two we don't hesitate for a moment. Van Huysum is a bore, while Pieter creeps modestly into a permanent place in our affections.

Jan van de Velde should be mentioned with Claesz and Heda. He was born in 1622, and so belonged to the earlier flush of still-life

painters. He was probably an amateur. His works are very rare and very modest, but thoroughly artistic so far as they go. He and Heda are the only members of this group of whom the National Gallery possesses examples. Van Beijeren and Kalf were two of the finest *painters* of the Dutch school. The decorative splendour they get out of a few glass and china dishes, bunches of grapes, crimped cod-fish, and so on, is extraordinary. Kalf's rare interiors are far inferior to his pictures of still-life.

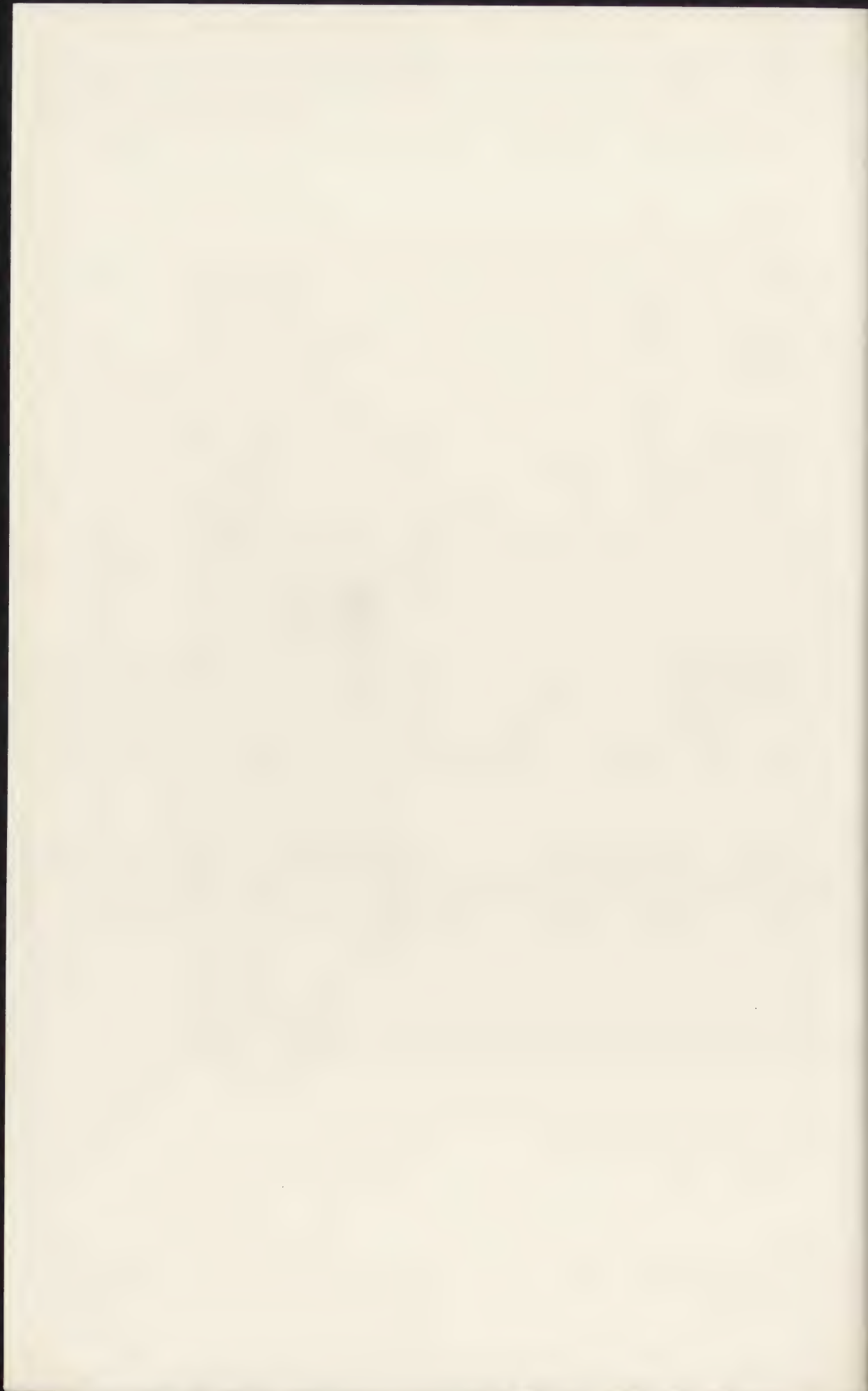
The remaining painters involved in a study of the "Peel Collection and the Dutch School of Painting" must be reserved for another opportunity. They include Rembrandt as well as Rubens, Van Dyck, and the interesting although comparatively unimportant Gonzales Coques.

Before bringing this present essay to a conclusion, I may perhaps be allowed to summarize its argument. What I have endeavoured to suggest has been, broadly, that the works of the great Italians and those of the best Dutchmen depend on the same virtues for their immortality. Qualities are to be found in the Italians which the Dutchmen are without, but with one exception they are not of a kind to affect the definitive reputation of a painter. Putting aside the gift of objective idealism, the qualities on which all works of art have to be judged, whether they be books, pictures, statues, or anything else, are as richly present in the Dutch school as in any other. Condensed into a phrase, these qualities are appropriate emotion and its sincere expression. The artist is he who has feelings and ideas expressible in one of the materials of art, and expresses them sincerely in that material. It would be arbitrary for any man to assert, off his own bat, that such expression takes precedence of all considerations based on the value of the objective ideas pressed into its service. But the world at large has decided that question. It has decided that the antecedent condition of immortality for a work of art is *that it shall be a work of art*.

We all know cultivated people who have no artistic sense outside literature, and we all know the kind of thing which appeals to them. I do not intend to name their favourite artists, for these, by the nature of things, are mostly alive. When they die they are too dead, even for a



ON THE SEA SHORE. *By P. Wouwerman.*



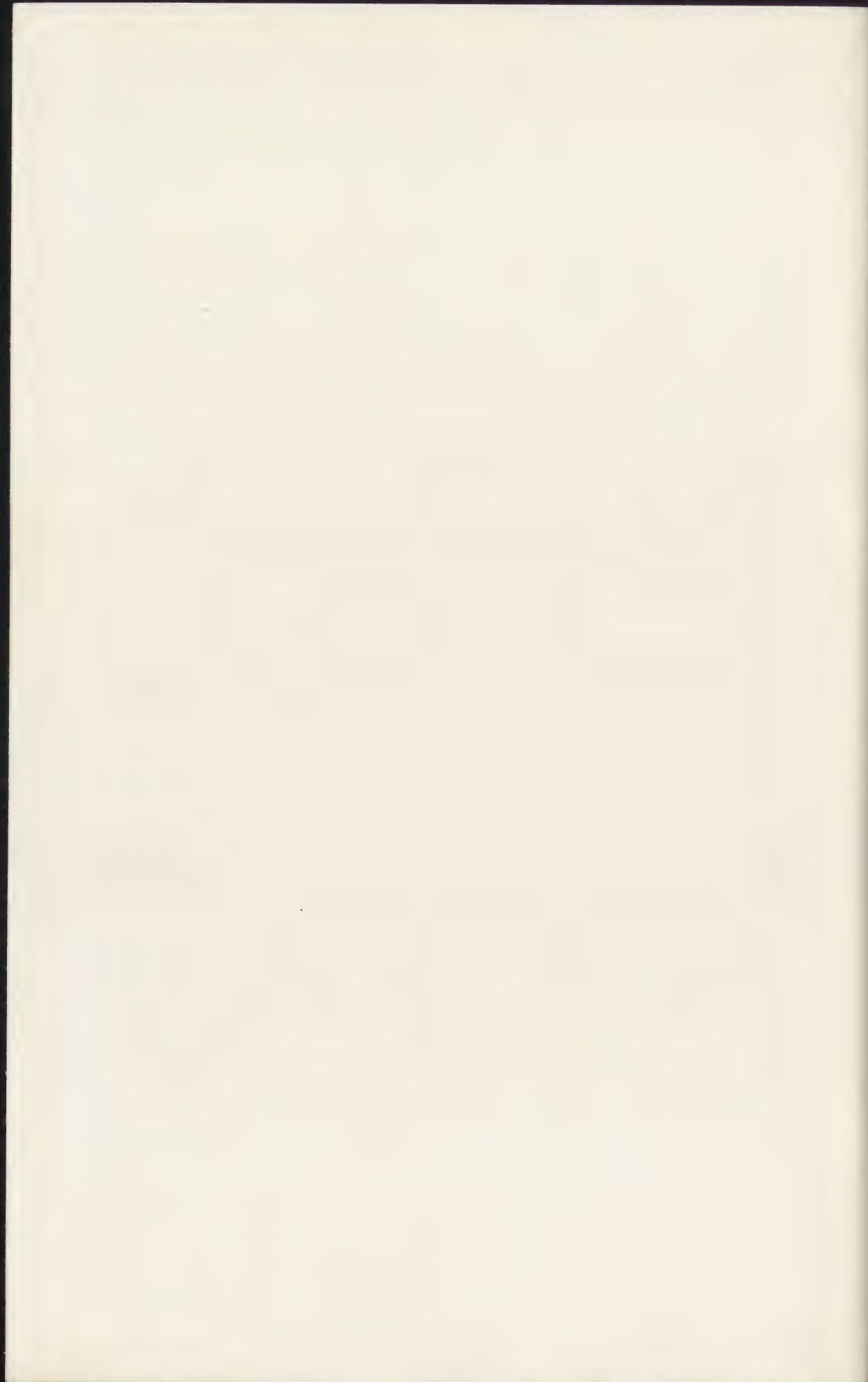


THE INTERIOR OF A STABLE. By P. Woutermann. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstängl.



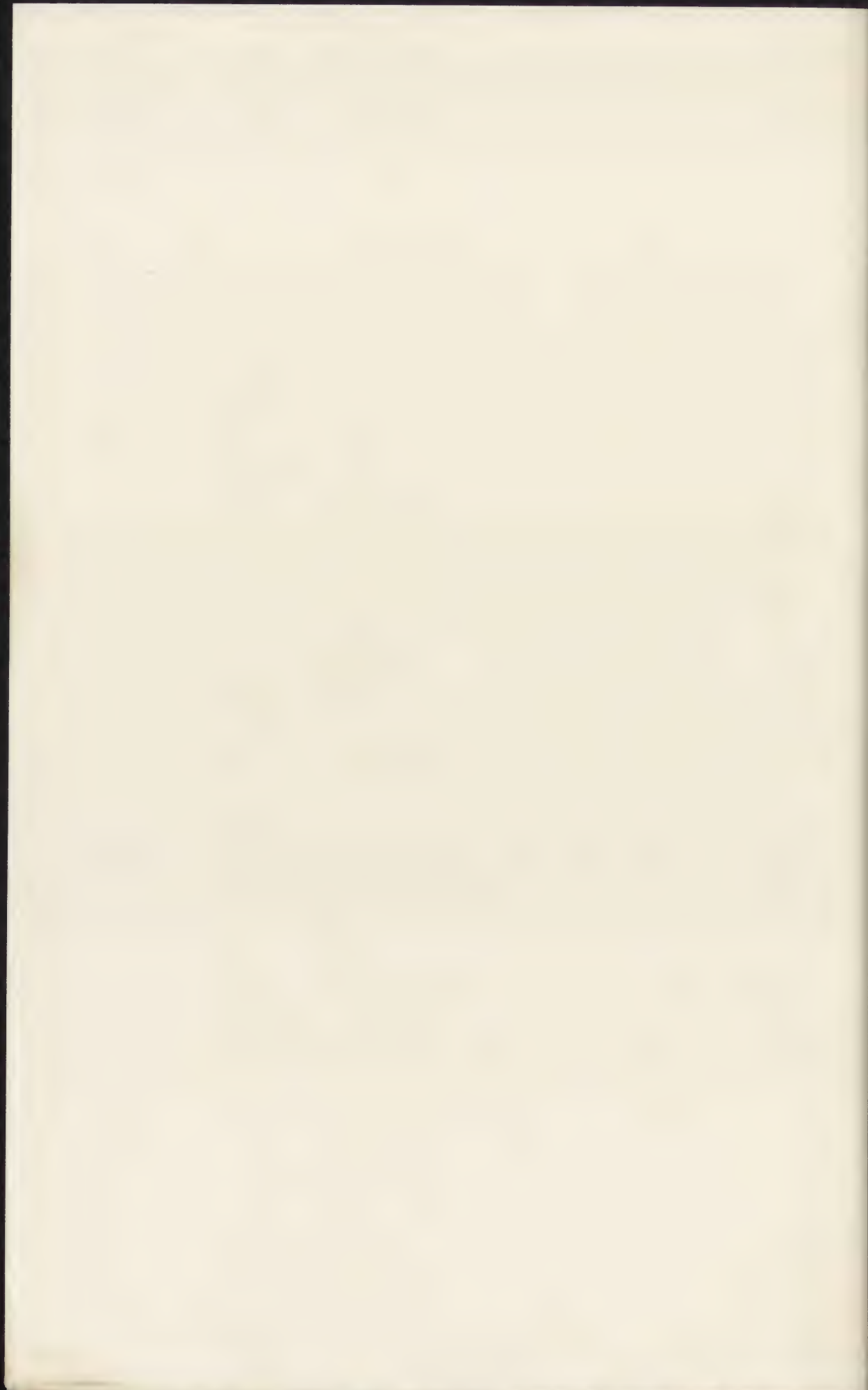


LANDSCAPE WITH FIGURES. *By Jan Wymants.*





FIGURES AND ANIMALS IN A MEADOW. By Karel du Jardin. From a Photograph by F. Hanfstaengl.



poet or a bishop. Their works are *tableaux vivants*, to use a phrase which, if taken literally, would be curiously beside the mark. They do not know that passion can be expressed in line, colour, texture, and so they get a model to suggest it by his features and contradict him by what they do on the rest of the canvas. The result is what an intelligent actor can give you at the end of a drawing-room. Such a thing may be a masterpiece as a *tableau vivant*, but translation to canvas does not turn it into a *tableau*. Curiously enough, people trained in letters, when they have to deal with an art they understand, adopt, as a matter of course, the very principles on which they turn their backs in a different connexion. A poem must be poetry first, and as full as you like of ideas afterwards. A description of manners must begin by being well written, and may then go on to truth. Even the historian can gather no fame if he cannot write. The mildest conceits, well used, have an immortality missed by stupendous thoughts clumsily expressed. It is precisely so with a picture. A girl at a spinet, well painted, by which I don't mean realized to death or even painted with skill in the favoured style of the moment, but so painted as to convey real æsthetic emotion from artist to observer, may be compared to a song of Herrick, while such a machine, for instance, as the "Mother of Pity" of Bouguereau, which is so popular in the print shops, may be called a parallel to "London," or the "Vanity of Human Wishes," or any other poem by any one who was not a poet.

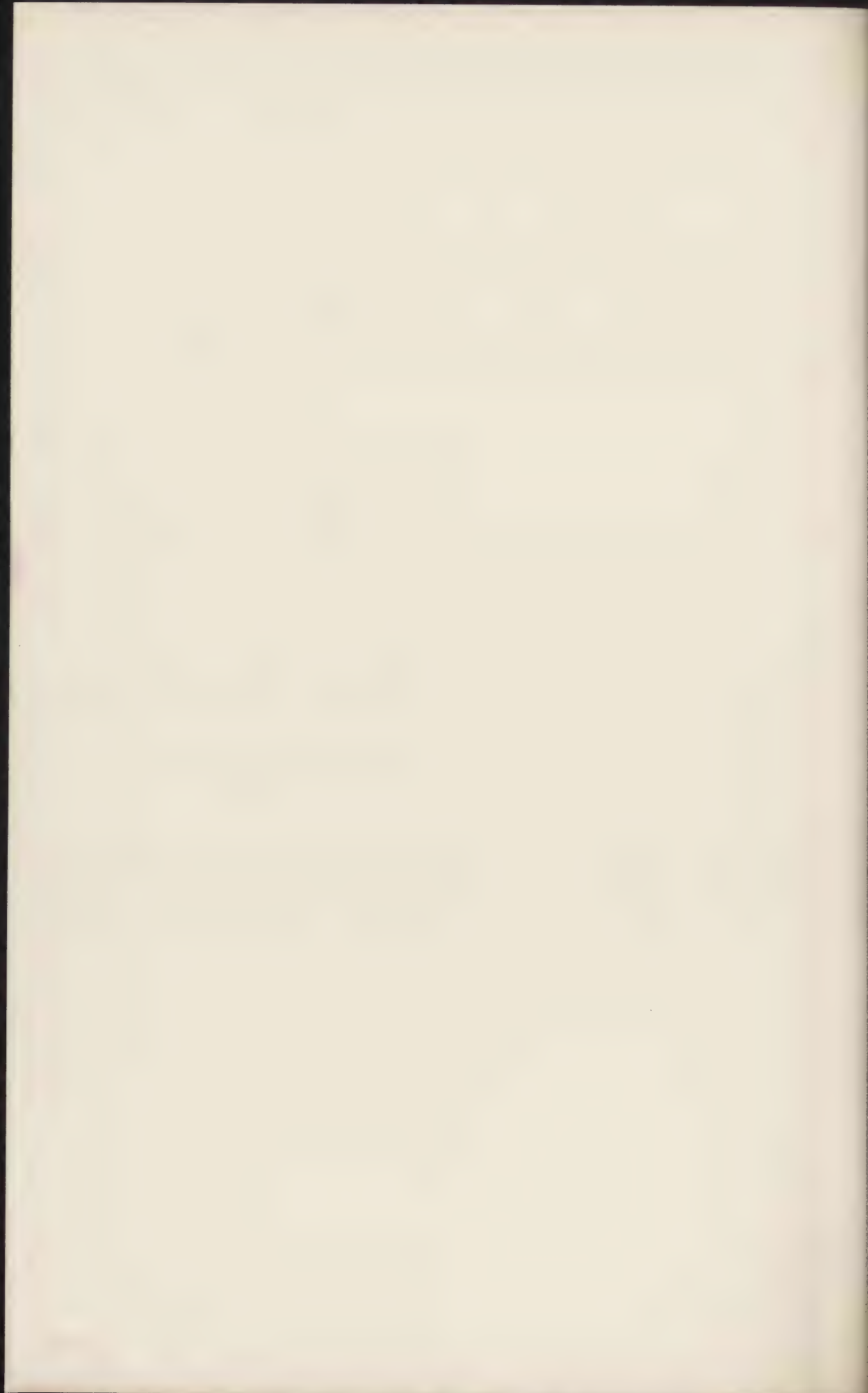
But, you may say, art plus grand ideas is better than art plus small ideas. That, of course, is undeniable, but it does not express the contention of those who belittle the Dutch school. The comparison they make is not one of degree, but of kind. Italian painting, we are told, is thought, Dutch painting, language. The suggestion of such a contrast springs, of course, from blank ignorance on the part of those who make it that the materials of art have power to convey thought. Would any one call Beethoven thoughtless? And yet he does nothing but arrange his material. Was Wren thoughtless, or Inigo Jones? or, for that matter, Mlle. Camargo? Fine Art deserves the supreme position it holds among human activities, precisely because it alone can express that union of intellect and passion which is the highest quality of man, it alone can produce a creation in which intellect and emotion are so

blended that we cannot tell where the one begins and the other ends. Passion is the creative element, intellect the manipulative. Through passion the forces rise, through intellect they are controlled. Such a work of art as a picture allows the artist to show that passion is alight in him, but that judgment, the perception of all fitnesses and appropriate relations, is there too to direct its action. Within the narrow boundaries of his work he can declare his gift for following in the footsteps of nature, and creating an organic thing, a thing in which all the parts are inexorably related to each other and to that vital emotion which gives life to the whole.

But this result can only be reached when powers are focussed on the work in hand. A painter must select for the sake of his picture, he must manipulate for the sake of his picture, he must be free to modify and translate for the sake of his picture. It is nature that he must use as a language, taking from her the words he requires and leaving the rest. The word "language" in the sense in which it is used in the extract with which I began this essay, can only be applied to those transcripts of external fact which Ruskin seems at times to have considered the highest art. Such a thing as the elaborate transcription of the west front of St. Mark's, which hangs in the Ruskin Museum at Sheffield, is language, if you like. It bears the same relation to art as an index does to a book. It is a collection of dead, or at least inanimate, material, saying absolutely nothing to the seeker for art. A fine Dutch picture, like Hobbema's "Avenue" treats nature with profound respect, because she is the mother, the provider of material, the storehouse in which syllables and words must be sought; but it retains its own independence, its own right to decide what shall be taken and what left, its own power to choose the end to be aimed at, and the particular note which shall turn it from a work of imitation to a work of art. Upon the vigour of the passion by which these decisions are gathered into æsthetic unity will depend its power to satisfy those who look for art.

And this brings me back to where I began. My aim has been to suggest that the Dutch painters were as elemental artists as those of any other country, speaking the same language as the great Italians of the sixteenth century, or the great Athenians of twenty centuries before; and that their indifference, so far as it existed, to ideas

outside their art, should not, and, as a matter of fact, does not, affect their fame. The nature they chose to illustrate was inferior in beauty to that on which Titian and Giorgione embroidered their gorgeous decorations, but no art has ever yet been condemned for the humbleness of its materials. As artists they will be judged, and as artists their one weak point is their incapacity to improve on those realities of external Nature among which they sought their medium of expression.



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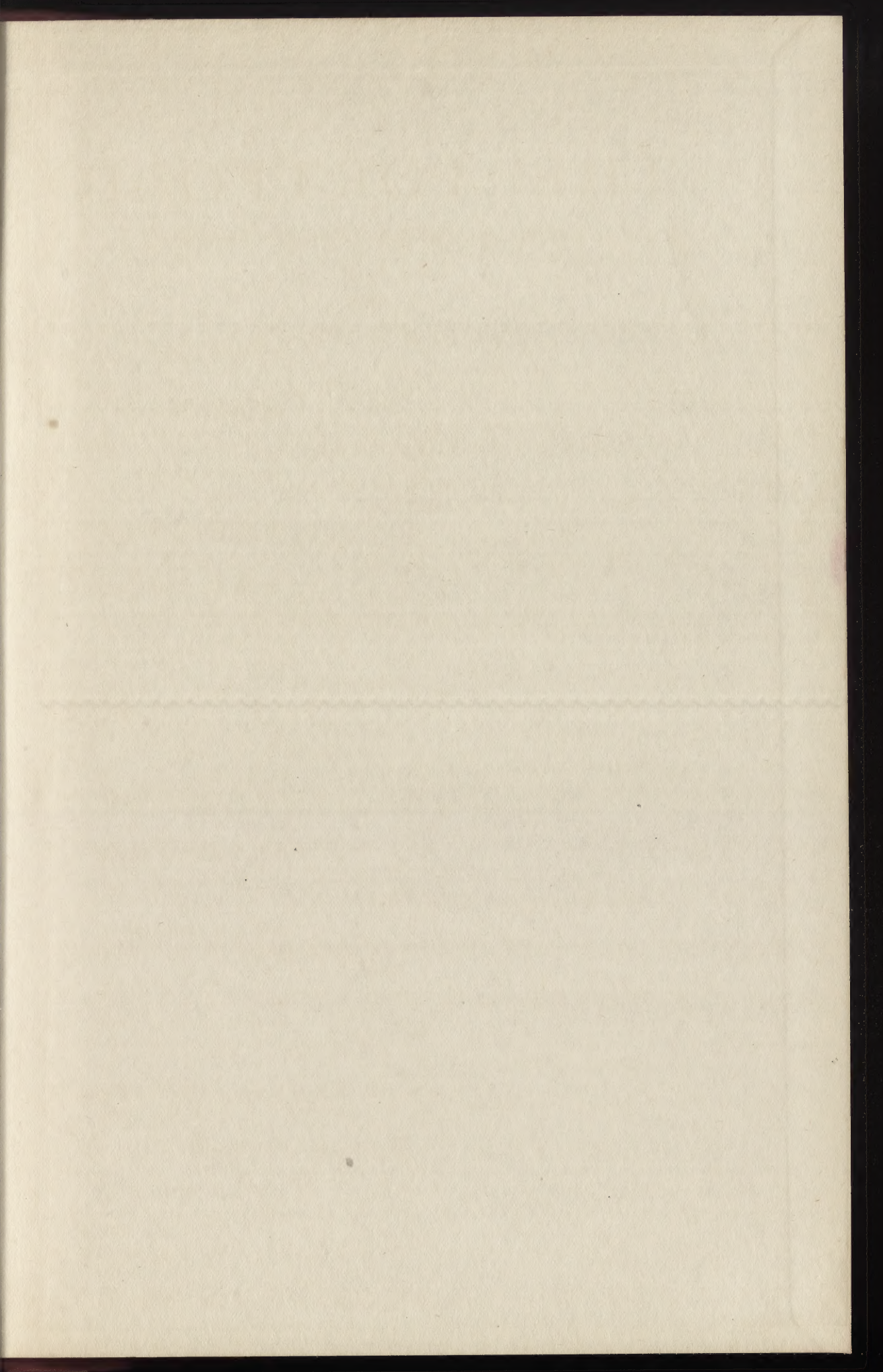
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